# Consultation
## on
# Internal Unity

—OF—

## The Christian Churches

(FOURTH SERIES)

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CHARLES R. GRESHAM, Editor

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# PREFACE

More than 50 interested people met for two and one-half days in the envisions of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society Library to listen to and address each other in fruitful discussion concerning some of the problems of the Internal unity of Christian Churches. The reaction to the papers presented as the basis for discussion was so favorable that publication was desired. The response to a letter attempting to ascertain how wide the interest would be in these addresses was so gratifying that the decision to publish these in booklet form was made.

To the presentations made at Nashville, a brief historical survey of this Consultation has been added. Professor J. B. Carr, who initiated the first interest out of which has developed both the public and invitational phases of the Consultation, is the capable author of this historical treatment. We believe that this brief account will enlighten all who are concerned about tensions within this movement dedicated to Christian Unity.

We send this booklet forth with a prayer that it may produce light, not heat: understanding, not incrimination; prayerful concern, not prejudice. We pray (as did Ting Champie at the Second Consultation on Internal Unity) that "a larger understanding will develop and steps may be taken, though they be very tottering steps, toward a Brotherhood working together in unity for UNITY."

DR. CHARLES R. GRESHAM,

Chairman of Continuation Committee,
Consultation on Internal Unity of
Christian Churches.

# WHAT CAN THIS CONSULTATION DO?

**By James B. Carr**

This is the fifth meeting in this sequence in pursuit of a solution to our brotherhood problems. Three of these were mass meetings, two at Wichita and the one last year at Tulsa. The one previous invitational gathering brought fifteen of us together for fruitful fellowship and study at Camp Redlands, near Stillwater, Oklahoma (October 1961).

There are only a few of us who have been together in all these meetings. So I would like to take a few minutes to review what has taken place and also to set a course for our consultations here at this strategic meeting place.

From a vast supply of correspondence and conversations, I am sure that I speak for the overwhelming majority of those who have participated in our meeting before, when I say that it has been evident from the start, more than just the desire for the healing of brotherhood wounds. There is also determination to work tirelessly and sacrificially for this. There has been a sense of fellowship and brotherhood on the part of many with widely divergent views. In fact, if this sense of partnership we have experienced with one another, even though in disagreement over important issues, were to be spread throughout all our congregations, our goal would be realized.

Inasmuch as no one has altered any basic conviction as a result of our previous meetings, it might seem as if such consultations were accomplishing nothing. But attitudes have been changing, and enough so that some who came to first consultation at Wichita believing that the cause was hopeless, are enthusiastic and optomistic now.

## WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED SO FAR?

1. To begin with, we have discovered that we can carry on conversations with one another and come to a better understanding of each other even though we differ. I feel that mutual respect for brothers in Christ has been growing among us since the first of these meetings and will continue to grow as long as the lines of communication are kept open.

2. Some people are impatient with more talk. It is such a slow process. But we need to remember that it took years for our brotherhood problems to develop-- and much talk went into the making of the situation-- and it will take plenty of time for talking out the issues before we can arrive at a satisfactory basis for fellowship and brotherhood. We do not dare set any time limitations on our attempts to reach understanding.

3. From the first, our meetings have been completely unofficial. We represent no one but ourselves and we exert no pressures and affiliate with no segment or agency of our brotherhood. We have adopted no resolutions and signed no petitions. Those of us who have been associated in all these meetings are certain that this is an important thing we have learned. We must not become an agency or a department of any convention, publication, or school. We must be free to work with, listen to, speak to everyone in the brotherhood of those who are in Christ Jesus.

4. I think we have learned also that we are much closer to one another in principle than we are in practice. For example, we all agree that our unity must be in basic faith and not in theology. Yet in practice all of us are prone to expect theological uniformity on the part of those to whom we extend fellowship.

We agree in principle that diversity in methods of work is a matter of liberty of opinion and should not disrupt fellowship. In principle, difference of opinion over methods of missionary recruitment, education and support, it not divisive. But in practice it has been.

We agree in principle that love of the brethren for one another will motivate unity. But we have not loved each other that well in practice. We should know by now that these principles on which we agree are meaningless until we demonstrate their validity.

5. We have learned that there are real issues which separate us and that these are important enough to warrant much study and conversation. Some of the issues have been discussed and

some still need to be explored. We have been made aware of some of the sociological and psychological aspects of our problem and recognize the need for more study together at this point.

We have sharpened some of the theological issues slightly and are fully aware that there is no easy solution. For example the issue regarding the basic nature of the church which brings into rivalry the concepts of local autonomy and ezumenicity. We recognize the problem but so far no one seems to have any answer.

And whether we admit it or not, open membership (inclusive membership, if you prefer) is an issue we have had with us for over half a century and we are still no closer to the solution than when it first showed up.

We are just beginning to reckon with a fact we formerly would not admit: that we, a Bible-loving people who plead for unity on a Biblical basis, do not agree with regard to the nature and application of Biblical authority.

Some other aspects have not even been touched in our previous meetings as the problem of brotherhood restructure. (Actually we have not been structured yet– we have had no organization satisfactory to all our brethren). Some of these areas are to be explored here.

6. Finally, we have learned that no one segment is going to be able to swallow up or control any other. Some of our divergent views and methods are here to stay for a while. And our problem has become how to live with this diversity and maintain the unity of the spirit.

## WHAT SHALL WE ATTEMPT HERE?

Solutions? I am a natural-born optimist but this is too much to expect. I am certain that each of us has a solution for all our brotherhood ills. And each solution would work except that our problems is that we have as many solutions as we have people and we cannot reconcile the solutions to each other any more than we can the people.

Our best hope is that we shall be able to chart a course and set ourselves and the brotherhood in a direction that leads to a more harmonious fellowship. If we can leave here with the feeling that we know where we want to go and that at last, we are on the way, then this may be a gathering of historic significance.

If, on the other hand, we go away from here with the same prejudices with which we came; the same unwillingness to understand or respect the Christian status of those with whom we differ; with the same smug satisfaction with the brotherhood as it is now; then we have wasted time, effort and money for no advantage.

Some attitudes have changed since these meetings began, but much more of this needs to happen. The small group which lived together at Camp Redlands for three days learned to love and appreciate brethren on a wider scale. I think everyone there grew spiritually through the experience of sharing openly his convictions while trying to make room in his religious appreciation for the cherished convictions of those with whom he could not agree. I hope something like that may happen here.

We have all studied and used Paul's illustration of the unity of the church from the human body. Various members with diverse functions are unified into one organism (not organization). In this unity the eye cannot excommunicate the hand because of differences between them. Neither can the foot withdraw fellowship from the rest of the body and continue to function as a foot. (As the branch cannot bear fruit apart from the life-giving vine, so a member of the body cannot function without the whole organism. As someone has said, "It would be like having a third verse without a hymn to omit it from."). The foot can do nothing for itself apart from the body, let alone function for the benefit of the body.

Jesus would not allow John, the disciple whom He loved, to forbid an unknown wonder-worker from witnessing to Christ just because the anonymous disciple did not belong to the same organization with John. In one account Jesus says, "No one can do a mighty work in my name and be able soon to speak evil of me. He that is not against us is with us." In Luke's account it reads, "He that is not against you is with you."

The point is that we are indispensible to each other as brothers in Christ. Our opinions, our methods, our agencies, almost all our differences are expendable matters of expediency. As Christ is indispensible to each of us personally, so must each of us be to the other in His body, the Church. It is for this that He prayed. We must answer His prayer.

# THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

**By Langdon B. Gilkey**

Although there are many issues involved in our subject, probably two are most prominent and should be distinguished. The primary one, certainly, concerns what may be called the objective authority of scripture: "Through what divine means has and does the Bible become an authoritive document for the Church?", or "How is it that the Bible embodies or communicates revelation?" In these questions such doctrines as revelation, God's revalatory acts, inspiration, and illumination by the Holy Spirit are involved. This subject has been exhaustively debated in the last 40 years, and I have little to add to it. The second understanding of the "Authority of the Bible" raises another issue: "How can the Bible be an authority for us in the Church?" "How do the scriptures that embodys revelation become the source and standard for church preaching, and the norm for church life and decisions?" This issue connotes, therefore, not so much the relation between God, revelatory events, and the biblical witness, as it does the relation between scripture and church, scripture and tradition, scripture and culture, scripture and the lay mind. It is this problem of the authority of the Bible in the life of the Christian community that I wish us to ponder this evening, for here, I believe, lie most of our particular problems as a Brotherhood. In order to get my show on the road, therefore, I shall assume at least a nodding acquaintance with the work of modern theology on the primary issue: the relation of God's revelation and scripture.

The answer to my question: "How can scripture become the central authority in church life," seems simple and obvious: Read it and obey it! This was, in a nutshell, the view of the founders and past leaders of our Brotherhood. And in order to prevent any other word from interfering with this authority, they sought to dispense with every creed or symbol, with all confessional theologies, and as much as possible with all other corrupting influences of "tradition." Likewise they rejected every form of clerical authority in the interpretation of scripture so that each believing Christian could approach his Bible by and for himself, and, in his own faith and commitment, read and obey it. Thus the Bible, read and obeyed by all, was free to speak its simple message directly into the church with no dilution or perversion through the human words of tradition, theology, or clericalism. If, then, the church is formed directly on the political and social pattern of scripture, and the Bible is the source and rule of all words and acts in the church, then we may be sure that the Bible is the authority for church life. "Where the Bible speaks, we speak" and "No creeds, no theology, no tradition – only the scripture" could thus be the sensible if somewhat optimistic boast of such a community.

This seems a simple scheme - and yet it has not worked. Or, to be more accurate, it is rejected by the majority of present Disciples as unworkable. When we ask why this is so, the answer is that this seemingly simple view of biblical authority itself presupposes a very complex series of ideas. If we look at these various presuppositions, we shall, I think, come to see how far we now disagree with this scheme, why it is faulty, and what changes in our understanding of biblical authority our own present presuppositions now require.

The fundamental presupposition is, of course, the verbal inspiration of the Bible. Only thus (i. e. if the Bible contains "God's theology") are the theological proposition of the Bible a kind of ready-made system authoritative for us without any theological interpretation on our part; and only thus are its legal exhortations directly the commands of God. In other words, only if it is infallibly inspired is the Bible NOT a historical document, i. e. a book deflecting the ideas of its time and place and containing views of cosmology and history, and ethical, legal and ecclesiastical prescriptions appropriate to its century but dubiously relevant to ours.

If the Bible is historical, in this sense, then some theological work is necessary to determine what parts of it are thus relative to their time and so must be re-thought for ours. If, however, the

Bible is inspired, then its propositions are not thus relative, and it can be merely read and directly obeyed in the simple direct fashion we are describing.

It is presupposed, secondly, that these timeless doctrinal and legal propositions are perfectly clear and comprehensible; that the Bible contains only one theological and legal message, and that that one message is perfectly clear and so contains its own immediate authority as God's word. If the Bible in fact presented many ideas of God, many sorts of ethical requirements, and many sorts of church constitutions, then an authoritative interpretation, outside the document, would be necessary to determine which of the many was in fact God's word for us. If, then, we say that the Bible needs only to be read and obeyed, we presuppose that the truth about God and God's law is as evident there as in any simple set of rules that need neither lawyer nor a running commentary to interpret them. The Reformation tradition believed the message of scripture was one, and that it was clear -- but they held to the need of the lawyer and the commentary, i. e. the trained theologion learned in the scriptures and their languages, who could declare authoritatively what in fact the scriptures said, and the confessional theology to guide their declarations. Our fathers went further, and felt that the scripture was so clear and its message so unified and simple that the Bible needed no confessional, credal or theological interpretation, but only to be read by the most naive believer in order to be directly and correctly understood. When we speak of the influence of Locke and the enlightment on our history, it is to this view that we in the first instance refer: that religious truth is made up of simple, clear, and distinct propositions, evident to any normal mind without meditation or interpretation.

Some further presuppositions are required to complete our analysis. In order that the Bible be regarded as the direct legal and constitutional authority in church life, it must be presupposed that the purpose and so the direct result of revelation is to reveal theological doctrines, behavioral prescriptions and laws of church organization. Correlatively it must be held that salvation comes when a person believes the doctrines of the Bible, follows its laws of morality, and in his church life obeys its ecclesiastical requirements (adult baptism, congregational government through elders and deacons, no music, etc. etc.). What God intends to happen with his act of salvation is that we obediently believe in the truth of certain new ideas, act in certain prescribed ways, and form new groups with specified forms. This picture of man's existence as made up of only doctrinal ideas and external acts, and of an eternal God concerned exclusively with true doctrines, external obedience, and congregational policy is again typically enlightment, and would seem ludicrous to us were it not so binding on our life.

It must be further presupposed that laws of behavior and of institutional organization are timeless in character, so that a particular "Thou shalt" or "Shalt not" uttered in the 7th century B. C., 1st century A. D. or in the 7th century A. D. (by Mohammed) can apply without further interpretation or change to the 20th century. Thus on this view an institutional form (say that of the 1st century church in Asia Minor) is not regarded as a result in large part of the social, political and economic forces of its environment, as a modern business firm or city government is the result of contemporary society; rather it is timeless, given to Asia Minor from heaven, and so able to be transplanted without interpretation into the 20th century. This totally unhistorical view of behavioral patterns and of social institutions is again characteristic of the enlightenment period, but about as alien to our attitudes as it could possibly be. If any of us were asked whether or no American city government could be transplanted to 4th century Siam, we would doubt the sanity of the questioner -- yet many of us seek to "restore the church" on the model of Acts, and thus to build a church which is, as I have heard it often, "The only 1st century church in the 20th century!" In any case the view that the Bible, in doctrine, morals and church organization, needs only to be read and obeyed, presupposes this view that the behavioral and organizational patterns need merely to be copied in order to fulfill the Lord's will for his people and his church.

As we realize as soon as we hear them, this entire battery of presuppositions, which made sense earlier of the relation of Bible to Church, have been discarded in our own day. Thus the pres-

ent relation of Bible to Church is in confusion among us and must be refashioned. First of all, few in our midst now hold the view that the Bible has been infallibly inspired so that all its words, phrases and propositions, its particular doctrinal formulations and its concrete prescriptions or laws are of absolute authority. This judgement is not so much the result of a particular theology. as it has been forced upon us by scientific and historical evidence which we cannot with integrity gainsay – at least if we drive Chevrolets and go to hospitals. In any case, we recognize that though it is the medium of divine revelation, the Bible is a human document, and thus that it reflects the limited and often wrong concepts and views of its time and place. In many, many cases, a difference appears between what the Bible directly and simply says, and what we know or believe to be true: about the age and shape of the world, about what events happened and how they happened in the patriarchal history or the gospel stories, about what God commanded the Israelites or even the early church to do and say, and so on. Thus for us the Bible is NOT an authority as a book filled with doctrinal or legal propositions to be merely read and directly obeyed; it can become a revelational authority only if through theological mediation the word of God in the scriptures, centered about Jesus Christ, is separated from the ancient words of the documents themselves.

The second presupposition that the Bible is for any reader a simple, clear and comprehensible document that can be merely read to be understood, has also been rejected. We know well that there are numerous variant themes and traditions in both the Old and the New Testaments, which, while perhaps not contradictory, nevertheless are so significantly diverse that no one message, doctrinally, ethically or ecclesiastically can be easily lifted out of the scriptures. Thus there are many possible interpretations of the Bible as a whole, and even of one book or section of scripture. The result is, of course, that if someone DOES find "a theology" or "a set of laws or prescriptions" in scripture, he has been guided or tradition, be it Catholic, Reformed, Campbellite, liberal or Barthian. Tradition, therefore, does in fact interpret scripture each time scripture is read, believed and appropriated. We can see this, as we have shown, in the clear influence of the enlightnment as well as crypto-Calvinist interpretations on the early Disciples. One can even say that the history of biblical interpretation follows and is illustrative of the history of church theology. Any view of what the Bible says is always the result of both the objective words of scripture and also the traditional presuppositions of the viewer. Both because of its historicity and its variety, scripture inevitably undergoes theological reinterpretation and modernizing if it is to be read and understood.

Because of these factors, then, the Bible is not so plain and clear to the ordinary lay reader as we have thought. This opaqueness, as we shall see, has increased in the last 100 years. But I suspect it has always been true that pious but unlettered laymen, and preachers, depended more on the authority of the learned leaders of their churches in interpreting scripture than they would admit. Each generation has read scripture through the eyes of his own tradition, however unformed and unformulated that confessional point of view may have been (see the immense influence of J. W. McGarvie's Understanding of Acts of Disciples Life). What the Bible says to us is, therefore, not purely a matter of its objective meaning, diverse and difficult as that is; it is also a matter of the theological environment or tradition within which we read it. Thus one cannot banish either tradition or theology merely by naming the Bible as the sole authority, for they function in the very appropriation and use of that authority.

In much the same manner have we found the second group of pre-suppositions dissolving in our minds. We cannot think now of God's revelation as the gift of formal doctrines and detailed legal or institutional prescriptions. Rather revelation means to us the communication to us of the judgement and the love of God in Jesus Christ, the gift of the covenant community and of our commitment to it, the wonder of Koinonia and of worship - and the means thereto in word and sacrament - and the many varied and unexpected obligations of love. This, or something like it, is what we mean by the Word and its effects. In this context doctrine and law are secondary results of a revelation, the spelling out in terms of human ideas and rules of a particular time and place of the implications of

this deeper communion with God's revelation. Thus to us, neither the most perfect doctrinal purity, nor a community founded on the most perfect New Testament rules (were there such) is necessarily Christian, for that theological purist, or that formally correct congregation may lack inner fidelity to God's word and love to their neghbor, and so "be as sounding brass." The gifts of revelation are not primarily those external gifts of doctrine or of law, which can be read and obeyed; rather they are the inward gifts of faith and love to which we cannot attain through simple obedience.

We have found, moreover, that moral and institutional rules are relative to their time and place. Certain obligations are, of course, everlasting: self-surrender to God and love of the neighbor. But the moral and institutional forms of these obligations change as the social and cultural environments change. What it means to be a responsible neighbor is different now than in 1820 because our social structures are so different, and the best forms of communal organization may be vastly different now, in our complex culture, than they were in the first century Roman world. Thus it may not be desirable, even were it possible, to transpose the outward forms of the New Testament church in Macedonia to 20th century Tennessee. But of course it is impossible to do so. A social organization is shaped far more by the social forces around it than by the blueprint in the minds of its makers. If it is in a large, unified, complex culture, the social organization will reflect this unity and order; if it is in a scattered rural culture, the organization will reflect the opposite. Try as they may to be a collection of autonomous units, Southern Baptists are more like a modern gigantic industrial empire than like the independent congregation of the first century. And even if they were actually like the first century church, with first century bricks in all their churches and first century water in each baptismal pool, of what importance is this if there be neither word nor grace, neither faith nor love there? In these ways has dissipated the early Disciples' picture of the sole authority of the Bible in the church, a Bible that could provide easily comprehensible doctrines and laws to a community that read it without tradition or confessional influence, and obeyed it directly in its external life. Our problem, then, is, how in this situation can the Bible be an authority in the Church?

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If for the reasons we have outlined, the presuppositions of the older view of biblical authority are in fact not valid, how are we to understand the authority of the Bible in the Church? Or to put it another way, how can we think of authority in church life so that the Bible can become the central and determinative authority in preaching, personal faith and church decisions, which our Brotherhood has always wished it to be?

As we have seen, the Bible is a twofold reality. It is an authority for us because it tells us of the great events of divine revelation; it witnesses to these events as the work of God for our salvation, and thus brings each of us, and with us the covenant community itself, into relation with God and His salvation. The words of the Bible, the concepts and images which it uses, yes, even the particular philosophical and doctrinal ideas and the ethical rules therein written, are, however, a human witness to these events. The authority of these histories, prophecies, gospels and letters comes not from the infallibility of their words and ideas - for many of the Bible's stories are legendary, its facts untrue, and its concepts outmoded - but because of the transcendent significance of the events of which the Bible speaks. Without this witness, these events and the God revealed in and through them, are inaccessible to us. Since our salvation and so the life of the church depend on. God's word in this salvation history, this witness is an absolute authority to us. But because the authority is in a fallible human word, we cannot merely "read and obey," or "let the Bible alone speak."

Why not? The reason is, of course, that the words and concepts of the Bible are human and therefore historical. That is, while they may in part be true, they are not absolutely, everlastingly so. They are relative to their age as are all human thoughts, for they reflect the scientific, philosophical, social, political and historical notions of their times. These concepts and ideas have in part been changed by their new religious content; but their scientific and

philosophical content remain primitive Hebrew or Roman, as the case may be. For example, the story of creation in Genesis is a profound witness to the power of God the source of all being, but it is couched in language and concepts that reflect early Babylonian science; the narratives of the conquest are a moving hymn of praise to God's providence, but they also reflect the very early view of how events in history happen, and they express a rather horrifying view of the justice and intentions of Yahweh, who rejoices in the death of Israel's enemies. The cosmology of the Bible, its view of history, and many of its notions of God are for us thus outmoded.

The result is that in fact the Bible comes to us in the 20th century as a very strange and somewhat dubious document. Far from being the simple and clearly comprehensible vehicle of self-evident truths, it is an opaque book filled with many stories we cannot believe to be true, and with many standards and judgments we tend to reject. What is the modern man to make of this collection of pseudo-scientific stories, queer miraculous histories, and incredible and irrelevant political prophesies? The modern reader of the Bible lives in a world of natural law, not of miracles, where historical events happen because of historical causes, not because of the work of angels, demons or gods. Were a modern man first to read the scriptures "pain," without the help of his church's traditional interpretation, he would find it a quite incredible book, whose surface untruth was obvious and whose real message was, therefore, quite mysterious. When one adds to this the fact that our materialistic, confident, humanistic and moralistic culture would find the concepts of sin, judgment, atonement, grace and self-surrender strange anyway, we can realize how very unclear and un-self-evident to the ordinary uninitiated reader the Bible really is. If this is so, then, clearly the Bible cannot be the sole authority for a community - for all functioning authority must of course be clear, precise and intelligible to those who regard and obey it as authority.

Before we go on to say what this implies for our church life let us note that this view of the Bible is much more current among our laymen than we usually admit. A generation or so ago the Bible dominated the thought world of most members of the church and today many of them do have it is true a traditional interpretation of scripture left over from those earlier days - perhaps Scoffield, perhaps McGarvie. Most of the urban members have, however, no such knowledge of the contents of scripture nor any such interpretation of its meaning ready at hand. Our churches, believing one need merely to read the Bible to understand it, have not sought to teach what it means: creeds, confessions and catechisms have been regarded as wicked Catholic practices, religious education is for the children, and so the adults have never learned either what ideas the Bible contains or what these ideas might mean. Often they try to read it, but, as many of them have admitted to me, they find it such a strange and obscure document, they can hardly get themselves to continue regular reading. Thus, while their living rooms contain at least one copy, most of our people rarely read this book, and consequently have little knowledge of its contents. Even if they wished it to be an authority in their lives. it could not be such because of their ignorance of it - and the thought that church decisions should be made in its light seldom occurs to them because they feel so far removed from its contents. We like to think that we are "a Bible people," but the facts are otherwise: it is a book seldom read at home, rarely understood in the pews, and never to my knowledge referred to in important decisions in the church's life.

This strangeness of the Bible, its seeming irrelevance to everyday concerns, and the corresponding ignorance on the part of the people of its contents, has, as might be expected, had strange results in the life of our churches. First of all, the message of Christianity, its word to man about God, about themselves about sin and their need for redemption and about their eternal destiny, has lost its place as the central gift of Christianity and the central concern of the church's life. Other concerns surely vital but not exclusively central, have replaced the older concern with the Christian truth that the church proclaimed: the concern for moral education for children, for the solution for personal problems, for healthy social experiences, for fellowship, for service in the community, and so on. These are the contemporary bases of church work and attendance.

the reason people give for valuing their churches - never have I heard in eight years in the South, "Come to my church because you hear the Word of God there." It is always "Ours is a friendly church," or a "growing church" or "its educational plant is excellent." The category of the truth seems to be no longer applied to religion, which serves other needs than that.

Of course, the various beliefs occasionally proclaimed in the church are listened to, but rarely understood and little pondered. They are regarded as an expected aspect of the church's life, like its spire, which are mildly valued but not felt to be essential. With regard, however, to what they regard as true, our members live in another world, the world of technology and commerce, the hard world of casualty and practical needs. The church for them is the bedroom world of women and children, of personal problems and of leisure time fellowship and, finally, of social prestige. Needless to say, this is a dangerous situation for the church. For if men don't believe the theology that is heard in church, they will not long respect nor listen to the moral lessons taught there. As one layman in Alabama put it: "We don't want to leave the Methodist Church, but we shall have to if they keep up their integration stuff." The church here is convenient for social purposes; when it conflicts with those same social interests by its moral concerns it is best to leave it. Clearly the church here is no longer a bearer of the truth about reality, and, as this bearer important to us if we would deal with the real world now and thereafter. But men will not long be interested by an institution whose message they no longer believe For then other interests, in whose reality people do believe, claim the concern of these men and finally claim through them the rule over the church.

In many churches that call themselves "Bible churches" and who are certain that the Bible alone is the functioning authority, we find in actuality for other authorities at work. The most immediately evident one is the "organizational" authority. That is, ideas or programs that threaten to upset the organization of the church are discouraged, then hushed up, perhaps not admitted at all, or actually rejected - as may be those who support them. The issue of the "truth" of these ideas, and of their adherence to "biblical views" is neither debated nor considered such criteria do not function. Rather the sole issue is "Will it split the church?", "Will it cause controversy?", or as in the recent Southern Baptist case at Midwestern, "Will it sow discord in the convention?". Thus open discussion of crucial issues is discouraged so that the organization can continue to function smoothly, or, as the acknowledged leader of the largest "Bible" church in America, a church proud of its prophetic heritage of freedom, said to us: "Where a multi-million dollar enterprise is at stake, cooperative members must keep silent." Even the Catholic Augustine, who labeled charity and peace among the brethren the greatest of Christian virtues, did not become so "unbiblical" as this latter-day authority in a successful "biblical" church.

The result of this weakening of the biblical authority in favor of the authority of the organizational needs of the local church is, of course, that in the long run it is tradition and local custom that rule the churches. This tradition may be ecclesiastical in character, as when people justify a church practice by saying, "We have always done it that way," a remark that might have been made by a medieval Catholic. Or as it is more usual, the tradition may ekpress the mores of the local cummunity. When, for example, on biblical grounds, the subject of integrated churches comes up, North or South, the arguments among the members usually develops with no reference to either reason or scripture, but in some such fashion as this: "That is a controversial subject and will split the church," and may then be followed by: "Our folks don't want to hear preaching like that, or discuss issues like that," or, "That doesn't fit with our kind of church or the way our people feel," and then finally, "This is our church, we have built it, we finance it and we can therefore determine its message and its membership." The same story could be told concerning other issues as well, from evolution through biblical criticism through dancing to nationalism. In such familiar discussions, the Bible has quite ceased to be an authority in the church, due, as we have seen, to ignorance compounded with indifference.

Clearly in the place of the vanished scriptures, has come as the authority in the church the congregation, its likes

and dislikes, its wisdom and its folly, and then, ruling over this new authority, is, of course, the overpowering might of local custom or tradition over scripture is most marked, ironically enough in those congregationally centered churches who most pride themselves on their "biblical basis and life," as the Southern Baptists so ably demonstrate. When we ask how this is possible, the answer lies, I believe, in our present analysis. The steady refusal to allow as legitimate the tasks of the interpretation and the theologizing of the scripture, the fear of catechetical instruction of the theologies thus gained, and the consequent loss of intellectual authority in the clergy and of intellectual content in religion, has together drained our churches of all values except those of social intercourse and of all standards other than those of suburbia.

What is needed is at least partly clear from the foregoing analysis. If the Bible is to be an authority again in the church, there must be, aside from the obvious needs of greater faith and commitment, a means within the life of the church whereby this strange document can be mediated through regular processes to the minds and hearts of the congregation. Preaching is, of course, the central instrument of this mediation, but experience shows that preaching alone will not accomplish this. A congregation unprepared by Bible study and theology is all too apt to resist and ultimately to reject preaching on controversial subjects such as evolution, biblical criticism, race or nationalism - and to insist on the usual ecclesastical fare of the "simple gospel" and of popular moralism which keep preaching irrelevant to the stuff of life. Thus, if it fights alone, preaching itself is apt to be ruled by the alien authorities of organization and local custom, and to end up being irrelevant to the great spiritual and moral issues of our time.

How then can biblical preaching be supplemented so that the authority in church life returns to its rightful biblical base? As we have seen, our crises comes from the dual problems of the strangeness and seeming irrelevance of the scriptures on the one hand, and the consequent ignorance of its contents on the other. What is necessary, then, is that the Bible be taught in our churches as a credible, relevant document, mediating to us now where we are an intelligible faith that (a) is not contradictory to the scientific culture in which we live and believe, (b) that is the answer to our deepest personal, moral and spiritual needs, and (c) that requires of us actions of such a sort that they relieve and possibly reform the community's deepest problems. Such an effort is, of course, the main function of theological education. Theology was, as we have seen, necessary because of the historical difference between ourselves and the Bible, and because of the diversity of the viewpoints of the Bible. In seeking to relate biblical revelation to modern thought and modern obligations, theological education performs exactly that task of mediation. And so in so far as it is peculiarly essential that in a "Bible church" every member understands, assents to and obeys what the Biblical Word says to him, it is accordingly necessary in such a church that each member, in so far is it is possible, be educated to become an amateur theologian.

Along with preaching, therefore, there should be in the church three new emphasis which may realize this goal of local theological education, that can, in effect, make the local church an extension of the intellectual activity of the seminary. (1) First, since it is the pastor who must lead in this educational effort, the pastor must be trained as much as an effective teacher of Bible, theology and church history as he is as a counselor and preacher. The view that the pastor need not be learned, or, if he is, then that he need be learned only in the Bible, is, as we have seen, quite false and has led us to the non-biblical situation we face today. He is the leading teacher of the adults of his congregation in the meaning and relevance of the Bible for them. Thus he must, it is true, understand the Bible in its own setting and in terms of its own concepts; but he must also understand the intellectual climate and moral obligations of his own time - and he must have some grasp of the historical journey between. Only then can he mediate to his congregation in terms clear to them, the present relevance and intelligibility of the Bible to their lives and to the life of the church. The Bible will only become the clear, simple authority our fathers wished with theological mediation.

(2) We should reduce as far as possible our hysterical fear of confessional or credal statements in our churches.

Our current problem is not a dogmatic clergy forcing all religious thought into one mold; our present problem is the exact opposite, a vapid ignorance of what we believe or what there is we might believe; a total lack of any Christian standing-ground of convictions about man, God, life, or history; an awful blank when we ask "What is true about God, about our life and about destiny?" If we ask, for example, in a men's class what they really believe, they are inclined to say "Ask Frank, the preacher, he knows, that's his business." These men are not at all familiar with the Bible, and in any case a person could not believe and stand on that whole diverse book of not theologically interpreted. And in the long church experience of these men no shorter summary or interpretation of what Christianity believes has been provided for them. We have always in our churches assumed that all of us, except the children of course, known what Christianity stands for and that we agreed to it, and so it needn't be discussed or taught to us. Actually there is a great, vague emptiness where there should be knowledge and conviction. In those cases in our churches where a traditional interpretation remains, such as Scofield, it has to be bootlegged into our noncredal churches, and thus it can neither be examined nor tested by scripture, reason or a larger tradition. Far better that the church prepare and circulate confessions of faith, not as criteria for membership, but as guides to teaching, study and discussion, and as a reference point when issues of belief or of other action arise for us as individuals or for the community as a whole. Let me repeat: men do not take seriously beliefs that they cannot verbalize and thus understand, and so which carry no personal conviction for them. What men really believe about business, race and politics, they can verbalize quickly enough. Let us, therefore, have verbal aids to belief in the form of confessional statements to circulate in our churches.

(3) Let us have much more real theological and biblical education in the church, and by this I mean education at two different levels. (a) First what other traditions call confirmation classes, but we might call baptismal classes. And instead of a few weeks prior to a regularized baptism at 11 or 12 years old, let us make these a year's course at a late teen age. And let us make the content the biblical beliefs of our churches, the fundamental views of God, man and of life, that distinguish Christians from their secular friends. Our free churches can well learn from the Lutherans at this point. (b) The second level of education should be adult classes, for those church members who are interested in thinking out their faith - and that will wish to think out whatever they do believe. Besides the Bible, these classes should deal with these controversial and yet crucial subjects difficult for sermons: science and religion, race, nationalism and so on. A classroom is a better forum for serious congregational debate than is worship; the Bible can be referred to as the continual norm for such debates; and finally those who do not wish to hear all this discussed need not come. This educational program is a large order, and the minister is already overburdened. But at present he longs in any case, to be a teacher, and he hates his administrative and community work. Such a new view of his task might make him a more effective and happy pastor through encouraging the educational side of his vocation. Too long has religious education been the province only of nursery school and child training experts. Our strange thesis is. then, that religious education or education in theology is the fundamental need of the free churches if they are to re-capture the authority of the Bible, an education that combines the intellectual demands of each department of the seminary Biblical, theological and historical, since its main task is to mediate the biblical revelation into the minds and hearts of today's Christians.

# THE INCLUSIVENESS OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Robert O. Fife

## INTRODUCTION

The question of membership has significance both for our message to the world concerning reconciliation with God, and our continued sense of belonging to one another as the people of God. This problem therefore presses itself with special insistence upon our attention, demanding an adequate answer if we would continue to realize our belonging to one another and retain the vitality of our mission unto the world.

Our movement had its origin in a message which called for the Church to appear from among the churches. We were conceived in the conviction that while there were Christians among the sects, the sects were not Christian. There was at once a basic dissatisfaction with the denominational systems of the day, and a yearning for the reappearing of the fellowship of Christ among all His people wherever they were to be found.

This dual motif of dissatisfaction and yearning is deeply rooted in our consciousness, and has at times involved us in inner tensions which threatened our wholeness of mind.

The "Burden of our Valley of Vision" laid upon us the obligation to discover afresh tthe fellowship which unites all in Christ, and to demonstrate that fellowship in living, visible form.

That we have not as yet fulfilled the obligation of that vision is to be penitently confessed. Whether it is in the discovery or in the demonstration that we have fallen short is not for us now to discuss. But it is our purpose, in the light of the word, to attempt an objective examination of that which we have believed and practiced concerning membership. Our hope is that we may more fully realize with one another the membership we confess in Christ.

Since the New Testament is the record of the creative acts of the Author and Finisher of our faith, we must begin--and end--by hearing the New Testament.

## I
## THE NATURE OF MEMBERSHIP AS PORTRAYED IN SCRIPTURE

When one commences a fresh examination of the New Testament with reference to its doctrine of membership, he may well be impressed by the fact that it contains no such phrase as "Church membership." The Scripture never speaks of membership in the institutional terms so common today. There is indeed a membership, but it is a living, personal relationship--not an institutional connection.

This personal relationship has two dimensions. The first of these is Membership in Christ, the creation of which is expressed by the phrase, "believers were the more added to the Lord."(1) Speaking of the physical body, and therein of Christ's Body the Church, Paul says, "Now hath God set the members each one of them in the body, even as it pleased him . . . . Now ye are the body of Christ, and severally members thereof."(2)

Under another figure--that of the Vine and Branches--Jesus describes the relationship between himself and believers.(3) Is it not significant of our institutional myopia that some have considered the branches of which Jesus spoke to be denominations! Jesus was speaking to individuals, and describing the intimate sharing of life which was to be characteristic of membership in Him.

From this it is evident that there is Church membership in the New Testament only as the Church is conceived in terms of living fellowship. It is only thus that we may speak meaningfully of membership.

It is further to be noted that membership in Christ is a covenant relationship. This covenant was mediated by Christ and is His gift to be accepted

(1) Acts 5:14 (2) I Cor. 12:18,27 (3) John 15:1f

by the believer in accordance with its terms and promises.

The terms involve the commitment of the whole person to Christ the Lord in faith, repentance, and baptism. They involve an inner aspect--the realm of the heart--known to the believer and God; and an outer aspect--the realm of visible action and fruits--known not only to God and the individual believer, but also to the Church.

The inner and the outer are to be realized as one in the "obedience of faith." Thus baptism in water is to be accompanied by baptism into His death, with consequent remission of sins; while ressurection "in newness of life" through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The outer is made valid by the inner. The inner is made visible by the outer. Each has, therefore, a place in our acceptance of the Covenant.

Jesus Christ is Lord of the Covenant and consequently Lord of its terms. This has significant bearing upon the nature of membership in Him.

The second dimension of membership is membership in one another. This is expressed in the statement, "The Lord added together day by day those that were being saved."(4)

Like membership in Christ, of which this is the consequence, membership in one another is a divine creation. While it is true that our response to the Gospel makes this possible, the creation of membership in one another is the Lord's doing.

Personal salvation and membership in one another are linked together. "The Lord added together those being saved." The "communion of saints" is a vital factor in our individual salvation. The gifts of the Church's ministry are "till we all attain unto . . . the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."(5)

As the relationship between Christ and the believer is couched in vital terms, so is that between believers. Hear the letter to the Romans:

> For even as we have many members in one body, and all the members have not the same office: so we, who are many, are one body of Christ, and severally members one of another.(6)

Again, after exhorting the Ephesians to "put on the new man," Paul observes, "We are members one of another."

The membership of Christians in one another far transcends our common institutional concepts.. It is not without significance that after his description of our mutual membership in the Body of Christ, Paul shows the Corinthian Church the "most excellent way" of love. (8)

We should note well that love is the only principle which is conducive both to individual freedom and social order.

Through identification with Christ, and with others in Christ, believers become members of the Living Body of Christ. As such they are subject to the Head of the Church, and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, by whose guidance they were led to baptism, and by whose presence they are inspired.(9)

Submissive to the Lordship of Christ, and indwelt by His Spirit, it is but natural that members in Him should cooperate together in fulfilling His ministry in the world. It is the will of God "that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another."(10) Commitment to Christ is perfected in concern for others.

Members bring different gifts to the Body. "If they were all one member, where were the body? But now they are many members, but one body.(11) Diversity of members is harmonious where one Spirit reigns. No member of the Body can rightly say that he is not needed or that he has no need of others. Self-exclusion, or exclusion of others is not the prerogative of a member. Thus we are called upon to bear one another's infirmities (12) and to seek together the Mind of Christ.(13)

Being subject to the Head, indwelt by the Spirit, cooperating together in fulfilling His will, the Church effects Christ's ministry in the world. From the

(4) Acts 2:47
(5) Eph. 4:13
(6) Rom. 12:4,5
(7) Eph. 4:25
(8) I Cor. 12:12-13:1f
(9) I Cor. 12:12f
(10) I Cor. 12:25
(11) I Cor. 12:12
(12) Rom. 15:1
(13) I Cor. 2:16; Phil. 2:5f

beginning Jesus sought to enlarge His ministry by sharing it with His disciples. Seeing the multitudes "as sheep not having a shepherd" He was moved with compassion. Calling the disciples to prayer, he shared with them His vision and burden, and sent them forth.(14)

As the Body of Christ, the Church is more than a theological idea to be debated, but is a living reality to be fulfilled. Much is said today about the "Invisible Body" of Christ. It is all too invisible. It is as we see with the eyes of Jesus, are moved with the heart of Jesus, and serve in tthe manner of Jesus, that we are members of His visible Body, the Church.

Membership in the Church is continually renewed and extended in worship and evangelism. In the Lord's Supper individual believers discern afresh their relationship with Christ, and their fellowship with Him strengthens their fellowship in Him. Here the membership which is of universal and eternal significance finds concrete expression in a given time and place.

Worship and evangelism constitute the Event which sustains and renews the Church.

Living participation in this Event, together with the activities which flow from it, is membership.

## II
## THE CONTEMPORARY PROBLEM OF MEMBERSHIP

In order to understand the contemporary problem of membership one must not only understand the root idea as reflected in the New Testament, but also have some appreciation of the historical circumstances which have influenced that idea throughout the years.

While a lengthy discussion of such historical development is not appropriate at this point, several significant factors need to be noted.

The first of these is the appearance of the Constantinian Corpus Christianum. This conception of the Church as an establishment of the State has had very great influence upon the doctrine of membership. The part which personal faith held in the original conception of membership suffered greatly within the context of the State Church. Now that the establishment of the Church (the State Church) is not so common as formerly, the conception and practice of membership which has been associated with it (i. e. infant baptism) remains an anachronistic cause of disorder.

The second factor in the long struggle between "outwardness" and inwardness." We have noted that each of these aspects of Christian membership compliments the other. Yet the Church has often failed to maintain them in harmony with the consequent loss of vitality or relevance. This failure contributes in no small degree to our present difficulties over membership.

The third factor is the contemporary phenomenon of the denominational system. The problem is not alone in the fact of denominationalism, but how we think about the fact. Some have accepted the denominational system as the inevitable order of the Church in our day. Others are quite discontented with it, feeling that it represents a "compromise with the world."(15)

It is to be recognized that this divergence of viewpoint has great bearing upon our problem of membership. The statement by the Commission on Faith and Order convened at St. Andrews makes this evident when it notes that unity requires acknowledgement of ministry and members by all, and observes that the achievement of this "will involve nothing less than a death and rebirth for many forms of church life as we have known them."

Certainly the ability of members to move freely from one congregation to another is a requisite of unity even among ourselves.

Having made these observations, we may state the problem before us as follows: How is the principle of membership reflected in Scripture to be realized within the modern context?

Many of our best minds have addressed themselves to this question with the result that several different viewpoints

(14) Mt. 9:36f

(15) See Richard Niebuhr, Social Sources of Denominationalism, vii, 3.

and practices have emerged. The solutions which have been advocated have been traced by a number of historians. Briefly stated, these positions range from refusal as Christian anyone unimmersed (M. E. Lard) to recognition of everyone who professes faith in Christ irrespective of any form of baptism (E. S. Ames, R. L. Cave). (16)

Two errors appear common in contemporary attitudes toward membership. The first is the assumption that ordained conditions whereby promises may be claimed are conditions without which grace cannot be granted.

The second is the assumption that if God is not bound to the sacraments, neither are we.

As to the first, it is noteworthy how some have made conditions of covenant promise into laws which would bind God as well as men. Since God has promised remission of sins through repentance and baptism, some would not allow Him to remit sins on any other basis. In this instance we would do well to reread the parable of the laborers in the vineyard.

As to the second, it is noteworthy how some have presumed to assure others of covenant promise without their acceptance of covenant conditions.

Both of these errors are subversive of divine authority. The one would limit God's sovereignty by forbidding Him a prerogative. The other would limit His sovereignty by presuming His compliance with a human judgment.

It is obvious the New Testament was not written within the context of the modern denominational system. We are therefore confronted with a problem which is in large part without Biblical precedent. However, certain aspects of its teaching are relevant to the problem before us.

1) Immersion of penitent believers in the name of Christ, unto remission of sins, gift of the Holy Spirit, and membership in His Body, is still recognized by the great concensus as Biblical baptism. Efforts to demonstrate the validity of infant baptism only underscore his affirmation (17)

2) It is a fact that God did grant the Holy Spirit to Cornelius before baptism. True, it was for a special purpose, but God could transcend the order enunciated on Pentecost, and normally seen in the New Testament, and He did.

It was the evident possession (18) of the Holy Spirit by Cornelius which proved to Peter and others from Joppa that the centurion was accepted with God and therefore should be accepted by men. Here was indeed a "pious unimmersed."

But while it was evident that God was not "bound to the sacrament," Peter did not thereby assume either that he was not obliged to teach it, or Cornelius to fulfill it. Indeed, Cornelius had made his attitude clear when he said, "We are all here present in the sight of God, to hear all things that have been commanded thee of the Lord." (19)

It remained for Peter to be true to both the commission of Christ and the confidence of Cornelius. Certainly it is a sober responsibility to be the instrument of another's membership in Christ.

We see in the case of Cornelius an instance of the sincere openmindness of true piety. It recognizes the presence of God in His Word, is willing to be taught, and earnestly seeks to "fulfill all righteousness."

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(16) Joe Belcastro has a helpful summary of these positions in his recent work, The Disciples of Christ and Baptism.

(17) The recent studies of Joe Belcastro which purport to place baptism "within the Church" merit careful attention. Admittedly, however, this does not represent concensus of the Church which has consistently maintained that it is through baptism one "puts on Christ." See Belcastro, op cit. Also his New Testament Doctrine of Baptism for Today.

(18) That is, evidence consisting of signs similar to those on Pentecost,

(19) Acts 10:33

The difference between the self-satisfaction of pride and the "peace of piety" is that piety is openminded--it is willing to be taught, seeking always the "answer of a good conscience toward God."

The Millennial Harbinger has some instructive remarks concerning this subject which are couched in the form of a conversation between "Luther" and "Erastian." The question is asked of "Luther" why he broke from the Roman Church if he believed his parents were saved while in its communion.

"Luther's" reply is significant. "They were pious members of that church which I could not possibly be . . . because I have been favored with more knowledge than they."

Amazed at this remark, "Eranstian" replies, "This is the first time in my life that I have heard more knowledge' assigned as a cause of impiety."

"Luther" replied that it was not knowledge which was impious, but failure to live according to it. "More knowledge of the will of God than conformity to it, is rather impious than pious," he said. He then leads "Erastian" to define piety as "the worship of God according to the knowledge of his will."

It is a "pernicious error," says "Luther" to assume "that I might be pious, virtuous, and happy by living in accordance with the knowledge of my ancestors, rather than by living in accordance with my own."

"Erastian" protests such an attitude, saying, "You would have us perpetually changing in order to our perfection."

To this "Luther" replied, "Jesus Christ himself grew in knowledge; and we are commanded to grow in grace, even in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior." (20)

In the light of this conception of piety it indeed seems strange that Christians should hesitate to teach each other lest one impunge another's piety, or seem to question another's membership in Christ.

But when did showing one another the way of the Lord more perfectly become immoral, unchristian, or inconsistent with membership in Christ? It is precisely because membership is a living relationship that it must be free to grow. Much of the difficulty we face arises from the fact that our insistence upon institutionalization seriously hinders this very quality of growth within the fellowship of faith.

An example of such institutionalization is the church roll. What is the proper relationship between enrollment and membership?

Biblically there appears to be but one roll of the Church, and it is kept in heaven. Thus the Hebrew letter speaks of the "Church of the firstborn enrolled in heaven," and Jesus says, "Rejoice that your names are written in heaven." (21) It is this roll which is ultimate, as the opening of the Lamb's Book of Life suggests.

The earthly roll is a purely human device, and is at most only implied in Scripture. Perhaps the Jerusalem Church did have some means of numbering those baptized, for their ministry to the needy would seem to have required some means of recording those eligible for such aid. But this is conjectural, and the fact that it is conjectural, is itself significant.

It does not appear that the early Church suffered from the modern delusion that membership consists of enrollment in the book of a church clerk. We, however, are "well blessed" with this delusion, as witness the readiness of many to become enrolled, and the "fireworks" which may occur if someone removes their names after years of inactivity.

According to our common tradition, the church roll is considered an expedient or device, the purpose of which is to record those whom the congregation has recognized as members. Its intention is to number those who in faith have fully received that which the Church gives and teaches, and who fully give life and witness in the fellowship of the Church.

As an expedient the significance of

(20) MH, 1837, 539, 540 (21) Heb. 12:23; Lk. 10:20; Phil. 4:3

the church roll may be changed, and with it our practice concerning it. This, however, represents our present concensus of understanding and practice.

It is to be remembered that enrollment does not constitute membership. Membership in the vital terms of which we have spoken may exist apart from enrollment, but enrollment is meaningless without living membership.

The church roll is not itself an item of faith. It is not to be confused with the record kept in heaven. But since it does record those whom a congregation has recognized as members, to that extent it does reflect that congregation's conception of itself and its faith.

A constant source of difficulty is the divergence which exists in the average congregation between its roll and its actual living membership. This constitutes a major problem because so many think of membership in terms of the church roll instead of in the terms of living relationships. This misconception has seriously compromised the witness of the average congregation.

In a day when so much of our population is transient it is important that we devise more effective means of aiding such members to transfer their vital Christian relationships to the Church where they live.

It is little wonder the number of "non-resident" rolls is so appalling when the average person has been taught that his name on the roll constitutes membership in the "old home church" long after all living relationship has ceased.

This very transience makes but more imperative the maintenance of common and universal criteria of membership among congregations. "Independency" at this point strikes a serious blow to catholicity. The membership of an individual in Christ's Church in Nashville should qualify him for membership in Christ's Church in Timbuktu.

In the New Testament membership is intimately related to koinonia (fellowship). As such it is seen to be an active, personal relationship.

For this reason the act of offering is an aspect of membership. It is a koinonia. Yet we are strangely inconsistent concerning this act. Many who share not at all in offering of life or substance are considered members because their names are on a roll. On the other hand, many who faithfully share in such offering are not considered members (even though immersed) because they have not as yet been enrolled.

Likewise the "fellowship of the Gospel" is an aspect of membership. Yet again the individual who has been duly enrolled but seldom participates in the preaching of the Gospel through his presence and prayers is generally considered a member. On the other hand, the one who may not yet have been enrolled, but who may support that preaching with faithful presence and ardent prayer is not generally considered a member.

Thus we find ourselves in the strange position of being a people who would be Biblical, but whose conception of membership fails at these points to coincide with the Biblical koinonia. On what Biblical grounds did the church roll achieve such sanctity that it could compensate for the impiety of the immersed?

Another important factor in the problem of membership is the "right hand of fellowship." As an immersionist body the exchanging of the hand of fellowship with the unimmersed has become a major occasion of controverrsy. Yet, in spite of this, little effort seems to have been made to determine the significance of the "hand of fellowship."

What does the act of exchanging "hands of fellowship" signify? It would seem evident we must come to a common understanding of the meaning of the act before we can come to anunitive practice concerning it.

The practice is rooted in Paul's visit to the Jerusalem Church which is described in the Galatian letter. Of this meeting with the apostles he says,

> When they saw that I had been intrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision, even as Peter with the gospel of the circumcision (for he that wrought for Peter unto the apostleship of the circumcision wrought for me also unto the Gen-

tiles); and when they preceived the grace that was given unto me, James and Cephas and John, they who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the Gentiles, and they unto the circumcision; only they would that we should remember the poor; which very thing I was also zealous to do. (22)

If this be our precedent for exercise of the hand of fellowship, it is clear that it does not effect membership in the Church. Paul was in the Church--and in the fellowship of faith--before Peter and the others offered him their hands. The Christ-membership of the parties was not a question.

Rather, the apostles were concerned for the achievement of a common understanding of the obligations of the Gospel which had been entrusted to them. The exchanging of the hands indicated mutual recognition of Gospel, grace and mission. They acknowledged one another as members in a community of understanding within the fellowship of faith. In this realm the hand of fellowship may have legitimate contemporary significance.

Our present situation as a people is germane to this principle. That all believers are obliged by the very nature of faith to witness to their understanding of the Word is most certainly true. The fellowship of a common mind is a divine gift arising from within, and crowning the fellowship of faith.(23 )It was this sense of the necessity for witness which occasioned the establishment of the Brush Run Church. (24)

But in the act of associating in order to bear witness to their understanding of the primitive Gospel, our fathers became members of a fellowship of understanding within the larger fellowship of faith, shared by Christians everywhere. They were compelled by faith to seek to be the Church in congregation assembled, but they could not be the whole Church by the very nature of their separate existence for witness within the Church.

Not having consistently discerned these facts, we have drifted into a practice involving two elements:

1) We have commonly linked the hand of fellowship to Church membership, in effect making our approval or endorsement a necessary criterion of an individual's membership in Christ or in us.

2) Having thus usurped the authority of Christ to "add" we have become involved in judgments of other's faith--which judgments we are not qualified to make. But judge we have, and our judgments have ranged from an "inclusiveness" which has left congregations well nigh without witness, to the imposition upon others of the "iron bedstead" of opinnionism against which our fathers so heartily protested. (25)

Perhaps we are served justly in having received so many heartaches over membership. One feels like the clerk of the Pleasant Grove, Kentucky, congregation who wrote in 1845, "O that the church could be freed from sutch (sic) perplexing difficulties." Perhaps we are now ready to return hear-judgment to the Lord, who alone creates membership.

If the hand of fellowship does not effect membership, it must not thereby be assumed that it serves no useful function within the Church. Quite the contrary. The hand of fellowship may properly represent mutual recognition of faith which has been expressed in appointed acts, common commitment to a task, or common acceptance of a witness born within the fellowship of faith. As such, the hand of fellowship functions as an instrument for encouragement and edification.

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(22) Gal. 2:7-10

(23) Cor. 1:10

(24) Fred Thompson has called fresh attention to the significance of this fact in his address recently published concurrently in The Christian, and the Christian Standard.

(25) See the essay on this subject in the Christian Baptist, IV

Speaking of the "scandal" of infant baptism and of the problems it creates for personal confession, Emil Brunner has said,

> The Church can hardly separate with certainty genuine from spurious faith . . . but it can and should determine who intends to confess Christ and who not . . . The relinquishment of this encouragement for confession . . . is a relinquishment of an essential mark of the Church.(26)

The hand of fellowship may serve the Church at this point. It is not properly a judgment of the motives of the heart or a sacrament of membership. But it is an act of mutual recognition and commitment which, if properly exercised, may serve as an "encouragement for confession." Improperly exercised, the hand of fellowship may effectively neutralize a congregation's proclamation of the Word.

It now must be asked in the light of these observations, What is the significance of an immersionist body exchanging the hand of fellowship with an unimmersed believer?

Of the several apologies which have been made for this practice, two appear most common. The first is that exchanging the "hand of fellowship with unimmersed members of other religious bodies is a justifiable recognition of those bodies. Since Christian union will, in this view, require the common interchange of ministry and members by all, it is thought to be in the interest of "ecumenicity" to receive members from other bodies without questioning the conditions of their original membership. Indeed, to act otherwise is thought by some to be a reflection on the integrity of sister communions.

This policy of recognition according to denominational connection generally makes no distinction between those who were baptized in infancy, and those baptized upon profession of faith; or between those who are confirmed, and those who remain unconfirmed. Such a policy is most disorderly by denominational standards themselves. Indeed, the pedobaptist world is far from content with a situation in which many of those baptized in infancy count themselves members of the Church without ever having been confirmed. (27)

In an era of many worthy interchurch enterprises it is perhaps but natural that this rationale for "open membership" should have great appeal. Certainly it is to be confessed that our mission as a people can never be fulfilled in isolation from the rest of the Christian world. We were not born to be a sect.

On the other hand, it seems to this writer that the recognition of any individual simply because of the institutional connections he may have not only ignores the essentially personal quality of membership, but represents a subtle, significant shift of authority from the New Testament to existing institutions. It is when existing institutions (whether our own or others) become authoritative or normative within themselves that they become irreformable. The letters to the seven churches of Asia represent the warning of the Holy Spirit against this constant danger.

From another standpoint, the unimmersed member of another body is received as an individual. He is a "pious unimmersed." In this view, we who would be the Church have no right to withhold recognition from such a one simply because he has not been immersed on profession of faith. It is thought this places an inordinant emphasis upon the form of significance of baptism, especially when one may have manifested devotion to Christ in other ways.

The first of these two viewpoints is ultimately contained within the second. It is the individual--not the denomination--which is the fundamental unit within the Church. The individual is baptized into Christ and His Church--not into a denomination--if his baptism is Christian. Therefore it is the individual who is recognized in the hand of fellowship.

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(26) The Divine-Human Encounter, 185

(27) See for example Baptism Eo-Day, by the Convocations of Canterbury and York, 1949

When we become concerned with the individual, however, we once again are confronted by the relationship of the "inner" and the "outer." Before the days of the "Lunenburg Letter," as well as in that document and the correspondence which followed, Alexander Campbell discussed this at some length. It was there commonly agreed that if the "outer" was not accompanied by the "inner" one was not a Christian. This was in keeping with the basic Protestant tenet, "No sacrament without faith."

Some also affirmed that neither was one a Christian unless faith was accompanied by the proper outer act--in this instance immersion.

From such a negative judgment Campbell recoiled. While his intense conviction concerning Biblical baptism was well known, Campbell's appreciation of the authority of Christ was such that he would not presume to limit the exercise of redemptive power to immersion. In the correspondence which followed the "Lunenberg Letter" Campbell wrote,

> Can a person simply, not perversely, mistake the outward baptism, have the inward? We all agree that he who wilfully or negligently perverts the outward, cannot have the inward. But can he who, through a simple mistake, involving no pervisity of mind, has misapprehended the outward baptism, yet submitting to it according to his view of it, have the inward baptism which changes his state and has praise of God, though not of all men? . . . To which I answer, that, in my opinion, it is possible. Farther than this I do not affirm.(28)

It is to be noted that Campbell stated this as his opinion. Indeed, what else could it be? By its very nature the "inner baptism" might have "praise of God," but "not of all men." It is unseen by human eyes and therefore beyond human recognition.

The realm of faith is the province of Christ and the individual; while the realm of confession is the province of Christ, the individual, and the Christian community.

For this reason a congregation cannot be content to recognize a person's "profession of obedience" without discerning whether it is "in all things according to the scriptures." (29) Since the Church has been commissioned to teach and to baptize it shares responsibility with the individual for his instruction and baptism. A congregation must not abdicate its responsibility as a "community for witness" by acknowledging a person's "profession of obedience" to be adequate simply because he thinks so. The congregation of Christ must seek the fellowship of faith with all men, and for this reason must never cease the "encouragement for confession."

The community of saints is for the edification of each member. As Markus Barth has said, it is "not a perfect assembly, but annon-going fellowship for growing and gathering."(30)

The fellowship of membership is rooted in personal faith, recognized in common confession, realized in mutual commitment, and fulfilled in faithful outreach.

Within the present context of baptismal disorder is there no place where the individual exercise of conscience may be made visible in the Church apart from corporate approval in the hand of fellowship? Yes. There remains the Lord's Supper, in which each believer may freely participate as he discerns his personal relationship to Christ and to His Body, the Church.(31)

As a people we have sought to fulfill the corporate obligations of the Church to preserve the Word visible by our practice and recognition of immersion and the Lord's Supper. But we have also sought to fulfill the obligation of the

(28) MH, 1837, 507

(29) See Dean W. B. Blakemore's construction of Thomas Campbell's definition of the Church as consisting of those who "profess faith and (profess) obedience." The Scroll Jan., 1950, 147, 148. Also DeGroot, The Nature of The Church, 90f

(30) The Broken Wall, 99

Church to preserve the reality of personal response to that Word by insisting that they are personally discerned--they are believer's immersion, and believer's Eucharist.

It might be understood why American Protestantism should have tended to "sacramentalize" the hand of fellowship as a criterion of Church membership, for Protestantism has not generally placed the Lord's Supper in the center of worship. But why should we, who have the precious heritage of believer's baptism and the weekly Eucharist, feel it necessary to conform to the inadequacies of common Protestant practice?

Is it lost on us that we are a major body in Christendom which practices both believer's immersion and weekly observance of believer's Eucharist? In the present condition of baptismal disorder, the "open" Table remains a gift sadly unappreciated. Indeed, I am convinced that much of our present difficulty over membership has issued out of our failure to appreciate the membership significance of the Lord's Supper.

Let us then examine the Lord's Supper in this light.

The significance of the Lord's Supper for the question of membership has been overshadowed in our preoccupation with the subject of baptism. We must not forget that a great stimulus to the reformation which gave birth to our people came from the views which they had firmed of the Lord's Supper. (32)

In general, we have observed the Supper weekly because of apostolic precedent, seeing in it a fitting memorial of Christ's sacrifice.

But the Supper also has significance for membership. This is clearly stated by Paul when he says,

> The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ? seeing that we, who are many, are one bread, one body: for we all partake of the one bread.(33)

Since our fathers understood the membership significance of the Eucharist, they seriously debated the question of "fencing" the Table from the unimmersed. This controversy came to a climax in the immediate post-Civil War period.

Out of this discussion came the concensus that the Lord's Table is "open" to every disciple of Christ on the basis of his own self-examination. This viewpoint was rooted in the exhortation of Paul that each man was to "examine himself" and so to partake.(34)

Unfortunately, however, as this concensus developed, we gradually deprived the Supper of it membership significance. Hence, it became common for the unimmersed to commune while not being considered members.

Occasionally a voice was raised that if the churches practiced "open communion" they should practice "open membership" with respect to baptism. To this others replied that one was as free to be baptized as to commune. There were also voices which said that since the unimmersed were not admitted to membership, they should not be privileged to commune.

The majority of us, however, simply continued to accept as members only those immersed while not forbidding participation at the Table to the improperly baptized. The Communion, we had

(31) A. T. DeGroot has called attention to the fact that our practice of the Lord's Supper may be our greatest contribution toward Christian unity. See his address, "The Nature of a United Brotherhood," delivered at the Tulsa Consultation. Also his fine treatment in his Nature of the Church

(32) See Robert Richardson's account of Alexander Campbell's inner struggle over the communion "taken." Thomas Campbell's difficulties with the Presbytery of Chartiers are well known. Richardson, Memoirs of Alexander Campbell, 189, 222f

(33) I Cor. 10:15-17

(34) I Cor. 11:27f

come to think, had nothing to do with membership anyway.

It is here we lost our way.

We must restore to our understanding and practice of the Lord's Supper the unity of these two Biblical teachings:

1) The exhortation that each believer is to "examine" or "prove" himself, discerning the body as he partakes.

2) The confession that we who so partake of the One Bread are One Body.

By our concensus of the "open" table we acknowledge that while the faith is once for all entrusted to the Church, faith is primarily personal, and that the membership made possible through faith is first membership in Christ. The faith is exhibited by the Church in the observance of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Faith involves our commitment to Christ expressed in acceptance of these gifts. As such, it is faith which is definitive of membership.

According to our concensus we have not made immersion upon profession of faith a legal requirement for participation in the Lord's Supper. In view of the present baptismal disorder within the Church (and the Corinthian Church to whom the words "let each man examine himself" were first addressed was not without its share of disorder) we have assumed there may be those who have "mistaken" the act of baptism, but who nonetheless sustain with Christ a living fellowship in sincere faith.

Since, however, the Christian community is not qualified to judge the hearts of individuals, we recognize by our practice that membership discerned of Christ exists in the Communion according to His judgment. The Church must acknowledge not only the responsibility of each believer to examine himself, but confess the membership bestowed and renewed by the Savior as He discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The membership discerned of Christ and the believer is not dependent upon corporate acknowledgement by the community in the hand of fellowship. It is true the worshiping congregation should seek to acknowledge those known of Christ, and this may be done as it beholds visibly His marks. But we must never presume to limit the existence of membership to its formal recognition.

It has been affirmed that any true philosophy of membership will be based upon proper recognition of the right of individual judgment. With this we agree. But some have concluded from this that it is the obligation of a congregation to recognize that right as ultimate, even if it means recognizing in the hand of fellowship one who is satisfied with his status although unimmersed.

This appears to be the implication of A. T. DeGroot's observation when he says, "If we begin with the right of individual conscience (expressed in the historic Protestant principle of the right of private judgment) we must broaden full fellowship beyond present-day closed membership."(35)

It is to be remembered that we do not only "begin with the right of private judgment," but with a commission received by the Christian community. The judgment of individual conscience cannot be made binding upon the Christian community any more than the concensus of the community should be made binding upon individual conscience.

Much of our present difficulty we have seen to be cause by failure to relate properly these two dimensions of faith. This problem will only be solved when we see that the believer's private discernment of his relationship with Christ does not properly exist in the hand of fellowship, but in the Eucharist.

In this view of the Supper, all believers have the privilege of sustaining their membership as they partake with sincere discernment. The Christian community is therefore saved from the awesome responsibility of judging whether any individual who has not "fulfilled all righteousness" as understood by the community is accepted with God.(36)

Such membership exists by act of Christ irrespective of its recognition by

(35) A. T. DeGroot, The Nature of the Church, 101

others in the hand of fellowship. Unlike the hand of fellowship, which as an expedient is linked to the recognition of membership, the Lord's Supper has membership significance divinely ordained. "The Lord knoweth them that are His."

Meanwhile, the corporate right and obligation of the Christian community to witness to the Gospel entrusted to it remains uncompromised, for the recognition accorded in the right hand awaits mutual acceptance of the visible signs of covenant relationship.

The discernment that some who commune have not as yet exchanged hands of fellowship constitutes a judgment on our human frailty. The proper response to this judgment is not in the sublimation of conscience, but in the fellowship of truth in love, with the extended hands (though yet unclasped, as it were) constituting an "encouragement for confession."

Not having adequately appreciated the membership significance of worship, centering in the Lord's Supper, we have attempted to devise other orders or arrangements of various sorts. But we have not succeeded in finding another which makes possible membership which is individually discerned as a right of priesthood before God, while yet being corporately recognized by universal marks known to the Church.

We have fallen into the dilemma of Lutheranism and Calvinism described by Troeltsch when he said:

> The main thing is that neither Confession has been able to solve the problem of Protestant organization, the reconciliation of the free inwardness, regulated by conscience, of individual religious conviction with the requirements of a Society based on a common culture and administration.(37)

We have therefore felt ourselves forced to choose whether we would modify the requirements of the Society to fit individual judgment, or force individual judgment to submit to the requirements of the Society.

In our efforts to solve this problem we have fixed attention upon the doctrine of baptism, not realizing that apart from the Eucharist, baptism does not afford an adequate basis for a Biblical understanding of membership.

We have received a heritage (would we but appreciate it) which honors the corporate responsibility of the Church to proclaim and exhibit the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, and which honors the right of the individual believer to discern his own heart's relation to God through faithful participation in baptism and the Supper.

We conceive it set forth in the New Testment that membership in Christ is created by grace through faith expressed in baptism, and sustained by grace through faith expressed in the Lord's Supper. As baptism is received in faith unto membership in Christ, so the Lord's Supper received in faith sustains that membership.

At the same time we confess that God is not bound to these sacraments, although it is there the promises are found. For this reason we do not judge what God may do apart from the sacraments; neither do we assure one to be a recipient of the promises apart from them.

Christian order is not to be based upon what is possible with God, but upon what is promised by God.

It is given to the Church to know the visible marks of Christ--both those which are conditional to His promises, and those which result from possession of His Spirit. The Church must remember that its recognition is limited to that which is visible, and therefore acknowledge its responsibility to treasure those visible marks. But whereas it can only recognize what Christ does in the human heart as it becomes visible in action, the Church confesses that it

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(37) Ernst Troeltsch, Protestantism and progress, 103

(36) It is appropriate here to call fresh attention to the work of John B. Cowden, Worshipping Toward Christian Unity.

is the Knower of Hearts who creates membership.

It is significant, therefore, that He has chosen to make visible His One Body through acts of fellowship which are universally known to the Church, but which at the same time call for individual examination of the inner life in the awareness of His Presence. The Church knows the immersion of an individual–the individual knowns the baptism into His death. The Church sees the partaking of the loaf and cup–the individual knows communion with His Lord.

Both of these sacraments are significant of membership in Christ and the Church. We have long taught this with reference to baptism. It is long taught this with reference to baptism. It is time we restored to the Lord's Supper this Biblical significance. Let it simply be confessed that as each believer examines himself and partakes with discernment, the Lord renews the membership of the pure in heart in His One Body.

Here is the union of the outward and inward. Here is membership freely exercised by all who are in Christ and made possible of recognition by the Church as it beholds His marks.

## III
## LIVING MEMBERSHIP

In the light of the foregoing study I would commend a conception of membership which is neither "open" nor "closed," but "living."

1) The terms "open" and "closed" are inaccurate. The membership of a congregation is not "closed" where each believer has the privilege of partaking in the Lord's Supper. Nor is the membership of a congregation made any more "open" by exchanging the hand of fellowship with an unimmersed believer who faithfully communes.

2) The terms "open" and "closed" are irrelevant. They refer to institutional connections--not to the living relationships which constitute membership in Christ and His Body the Church.

3) The practice of "ecumenical" membership falls under the same judgment, for it also defines membership in the way the records of a congregation are kept, rather than in the way the relationships within a congregation are lived.

4) "Denominational" or "movement" membership is not our concern, save as it (paradoxically) becomes our concern. The very genius of our movement is that it would not win members to itself (witness the dissolution of the Springfield Presbytery) but to Christ and His Church.

If we would be the Church we must have a conception of membership which has relevance for the Church, and is not primarily concerned with a denominational connection. We must, moreover, have a practice which adequately conforms to this conception.

Such membership will have the following attributes:

1) It will be membership individually discerned. This aspect of membership consists in free participation by the believer in the appointed acts of faith whereby he discerns his relation to Christ and to His Body, the Church.

2) It will be membership corporately recognized. This aspect of membership consists in the recognition of the Church which confesses the appointed acts of personal faith to be acts of fellowship. The "right hand of fellowship" stands as the community's "encouragement" to the believer, leading him to make confession in these acts whereby the Church may discern his faith and his fellowship.

3) It will be membership conceived in terms of living relationships--life offered in worship, mutual service of brethren, and in the fellowship of the Gospel unto the world. The constraining love of Christ is the first fruit of the Spirit and the supreme manifestation of membership.

Here are not several memberships, but one membership in Christ and His Church, viewed in its two aspects of individual discernment and corporate recognition, but withal universal and living.

It remains for us to devise records

which are descriptive of these aspects of membership, and cease thinking of the records as definitive of membership.

The Church, which has been commissioned to bring all men to the Lord Christ, cannot be satisfied until all those who belong to Him come to know their belonging to one another.

To this end let us "speak the truth in love," that we "may grow up in all things unto Him, who is the head, even Christ; from whom all the body fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love."(38)

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(38) Eph. 4:15, 16

# INSTITUTIONALIZATION
# AND
# CHURCH UNITY

*By*
*Lloyd Taylor*

## OUTLINE

I. The Process of Institutionalization

1. The Developing Social Movement
2. Identifying the Basic Term
3. The Influence of Culture

II. The Relationship to Christian Unity

1. The Place of Personality Conflict
2. Perpetuating the Institution
3. Identifying with God
4. Polarization

III. Proposed Solutions

1. Accepting Institutional Structure
2. Living with Existing Structures So As to Minimize Effects
3. Lines of Communication
4. Recognize the Human Element
5. The Final Word

# INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND CHRISTIAN UNITY

One day Jesus was visiting with a woman at the well near Sychar. As he probed into her religious motivation, she became quite defensive. In her attempt to end the soul searching, she brought up a most interesting question: "Tell me, is it right to worship on this mountain or in Jerusalem?" This had been a burning issue between the Samaritans and the Jews for years. It had originated when the Jews had not allowed the Samaritans to worship with them in Jerusalem; the Samaritans had established another mountain of worship. In Jesus' day the institutional structures of worship were complete at both places. Before we condemn the Samaritans too much, however, we must remember that Jesus was crucified by the orthodox in Jerusalem in the shadow of the location of true old Testament Judaism. Jesus had heard these arguments many times before. He knew that people whose hearts were stained with sin could with all self-righteousness substantiate a place to worship as being the right one. You know Jesus' reply was: "The time comes and now is when the true worshipper shall worship God in spirit and in truth." What Jesus was doing was sweeping aside the institutional aspects of religion as being secondary to the content and the reaction to that content. Jesus was suggesting that institutional loyalty may easily become a facade to mask insincerity in the basic content of religious practice or in its helpful outreach to needy mankind. He saw that the institutional aspects of religion had historical and cultural origins and could have temporal destinies but that the content of religion was timeless. His judgment has been vindicated by history for indeed the Samaritan institution has perished and the Jewish has gone through a drastic metamorphosis yet the worship of God in spirit and in truth has survived.

The sociologist is greatly interested in the institutional aspects of religious worship. He knows that if he seeks to inquire too closely the devout will object to becoming an object of scientific study.[1] On the other hand, he is convinced that religion has its cultural and historical origins as well as its subjective and moral implications. Religious practice may be as much a phase of culture as it is a matter of divine revelation.[2] Thus we may justify elders and deacons by divine precedent but we justify an official board of trustees by the law of the land which seeks to make corporate groups of people legally responsible for their corporate acts. Elders and deacons may be biblical but trustees are cultural. Had we been living in Jesus' day we could have turned our attention to a study of how the institutions of worship of Jehovah had arisen at Samaria and Jerusalem and what it would take to effect a degree of unity between these two groups who, though serving the same God, could not stand each other. But in the light of history such inquiry and description would be moot. It is much more relevant to our purposes, therefore, to see if there are institutional elements that enter into our present day discussions of unity. Perhaps we cannot examine them as objectively as we could the Jew-Samaritan questions but the results can be more meaningful to us. Certainly if institutions are temporal and transitory we cannot expect them to provide an adequate basis for the unity of a church that is supposed to be eternal.

[1]Hoult, The Sociology of Religion, p. ii.

[2]See Barnes and Becker, Contemporary Social Theory, p. 834.

# I

The eternal truth persists. It runs in unbroken lines down through the centuries. It falls in ever new and iridescent colors upon the minds of men calling them from their lowly ways to new adventures with God. Often in a fading or decadent religious system someone will catch the vision anew and seek to recreate it in the context of his own experience for those about him to share. No one knows better than the consecrated man that he has this treasure in an earthen vessel. No one is more aware of his problem of translating a pure and perfect idea into form and shape that is relevant for a given time and place. The limitations of turning pure form to imperfect matter, faced first philosophically by Plato, are faced by the man who has caught the perfect vision but has but human clay and terrestrial form to express it.

This refashioning of an idea into a dynamic is a social movement. The sociologist identifies specific steps in the social movement for he sees them repeated again and again not only in religion but also in political science and economic groups as well.[3] The steps are as obvious in the movement of Martin Luther as they are in the formation of the Townsend Clubs of the 1930's. First come persons with deep discontent. They are unhappy with the present state of affairs; they feel that there is much ahead that can be better if they exert the effort. The next stage in their development is a growing consciousness that there are many about them who share their discontent and their resolve to do something. They come to feel that their needs are not personal or local but are general and universal. Like-minded persons seek each other out over the miles to find their points of agreement and to formulate plans. Out of these moves comes a formal structuring that they might by collective action, limited at first, do what they can never do alone. It is at this point that leadership emerges and the outline of the movement begins to take form. Human leadership must ever fashion its goals in its own definition of the attainable and the means to attain it. Often it is at this same time that serious difficulty may arise in the movement because of personality conflicts between leaders of previously autonomous groups. The final stage in the development of the social movement is institutionalization. It is this last stage that is to center our attention in this discourse because it is here that the divisive elements of social interaction become manifest.

Institutionalization is the process through which relatively simple groupings became institutions. The term also refers to the changed values and relationships and procedures which are a result of this process. Another way to express this same idea is to say that institutionalization is the development of orderly, stable and socially integrating forms and structures out of loosely patterned or merely technical types of action.[5] Here the emphasis is upon the words orderly, stable, and socially integrating. Each of these is a relative term, - relative to the society in which the group seeks to crystallize its way. Therefore, institutionalization is a product of the culture in which it takes place. It is formed to conform to those cultural patterns and it will have relevance to individuals who are totally or partially conversant with and participating in that culture.[6] To others it will seem irrelevant if not

[3] See: Green, Sociology, pp. 622ff for a well stated summary of the nature of social movements.

[4] Hoult, op. cit., p. 66.

[5] Broom and Selznick, Sociology, p. 238.

[6] For other definitions of institutionalization see: Bierstedt, The Social Order, p. 299; Roucek, Readings in Contemporary American Sociology, pp. 64, 65; Stotts, Introduction to the Sociology of Religion, p. 165; Merrill, Society and Culture, p. 378; and Chinoy, An Introduction to Sociology.

incomprehensible. An example should suffice. In a certain part of India Christian missionaries required that the native convert cut a lock of his hair before he would be accepted into the church. Some were very critical of this move. Others explained it by saying that this lock of hair was the basis of much superstition concerning evil spirits. To cut it off was to make a visible outward sign of sincerity in turning from the past to a new way of life rather than just adding Jesus to a pantheon of several million other deities. Such an action in our country would be incomprehensible but in India it had much social meaning.

This process in itself is perfectly natural when men meet to try to supply a common need. There must be some structure for the expression of their collective action. Though the men concerned may not be aware of institution forming principles, though they may deny that they are seeking to form another social structure, they nonetheless, are laying a foundation for a possible new religious institution within society. There is nothing inherently wrong in this for this has been a common pattern of man's behavior.[8] As we shall see later, the difficulties with institutional structures in regard to unity lie in other contexts.

The original illustration gives evidence of the analysis thus far. When the Samaritans were denied access to the Jewish worship center they had another alternative. They could build a worship of their own. This they did. They ordained priests, designed a ritual, built a building. There is no reason to suppose that any of these elements of worship were radically different from other existing institutions. Slowly but surely the Samaritans established a following, built a loyalty among their followers and became so confident of their rightness that they became serious rivals to the existing structure in Jerusalem. Interestingly enough, however, though they were rivals in form they were strangely like that group which they professed to surpass in content.

There are some cultural settings that inhibit the growth of new organizations. American culture, on the other hand, facilitates the organization and growth of various groups. Americans have an amazing proclivity to meet, elect a president and treasurer, approve by-laws, and have refreshments. Our laws protect the rights of people to meet under circumstances of their own choosing as long as they do not endanger the welfare of the state. Religious groups in America have availed themselves of this freedom and have established imposing organizations with assets in the billions, followers numbered by millions and political power at their disposal most impressive.[9] The Restoration Movement has been a part of this religious proliferation in America. No matter how well intentioned the Campbell's may have been not to start a new denominational group it was not long before their followers were identified by specific terminology, were raising up leaders for their churches, were organizing colleges, publishing houses and missionary societies, and were taking form and shape much like the groups from which they had come. Since that time the "Movement" has had those within it who have sought to harken back to the good old days of a stirring of Christians within all churches only to find that they too, in reaching back, become structured institutions. Note how true this has been of the major schism about the turn of the century. Or again, the other day I read an impassioned

[7]See Hoult, op. cit. p. 66.

[8]See Stotts, An Introduction to the Sociology of Religion, pp. 175, 176 and Roucek, op. cit., pp. 66 ff.

[9]See Cuber, Sociology, p. 538.

statement by a young Bible College graduate. He had all the terminology straight, - we are not a denomination, we are not Protestants, we are Christians only. It seems he had taken a public school teaching position in a fairly large city and had sought out the congregation near him served by a graduate of his alma mater. He had supposed that this would be a true to the book church. The burden of his article was that the congregation was doing so many things just like the other congregations, indeed denominations, around them that he could scarcely tell the difference. His article ended with the frustrating question: "What's happening to us?" There was a hint that he himself might head a reform movement, split this congregation and found one that was truly true to the book. Who knows? This might well be the beginning of another religious institution in American society.

Various authors describe the developmental process of institutions in different ways.[10] Charles Horton Cooley, long recognized authority on group life and behavior, has described the developing institution in four steps.[11] The first stage in incipient organization, - the period when people are searching for an appropriate adjustment to the demands of the moment. Once they can agree upon techniques that seem to meet felt needs, these techniques are laid down and passed on. In a religious movement this is when those who have been caught by the fervor of the new movement seek acceptable and workable means to pass the good word on to others. The second stage is efficiency when the potential values of the institution to the individual and the individual to the institution are realized. It seems that a way of order might better preserve the original spontaneity of the group. The third stage is formalism. This occurs when the group establishes rules, forms a chain of command, sets forms of ritual, and builds material structures in which to implement these stages. The fourth stage is disorganization. This is characterized by the mechanisms that once worked so well becoming nonfunctional or even dysfunctional. The ideals of the institution impress the members in only a superficial way. Individuals feel little sense of guilt when they engage in behavior not traditionally approved. Indifferentism becomes common. There is a growing awareness that the goals of the institution are not being fulfilled. The outworn forms are often discarded or radically altered into something more suitable. And thus the life cycle of an institution is played out.

I am sure that these elements are all discernible in the life of our people. Meetings of individuals who were dissatisfied with conditions as they were, for whatever reason, were and are common among our brethren. Suggested ways of becoming more efficient in the discontent usually follow, - rump sessions at conventions, rallies, committees of 1,000. These all disclaim any official status, power or action. Strangely enough often very efficient continuation committees emerge from these meetings to formulate ways to forward the ends mutually desired. The third stage is seen in establishing legally recognized corporations to carry out the plans of the emerging groups. This stage is rather easy to mark for our secular laws demand certain legal steps be taken to establish corporate responsibility. Thus colleges that form select boards of trustees, publishing companies editors, old people's homes business managers. As far as society is concerned the movement is institutionalized whether it recognizes itself to be so or not. We have witnessed the fourth stage recurring again and again as churches, associations, col-

[10] See Hiller, Social Relations and Structures, pp. 219 ff; Brocm and Selznick, Sociology, pp. 238 ff.

[11] As cited in Hoult, op. cit., pp. 67 ff.

leges, and various other legally constituted bodies lose their constituency and pass from the picture.

The effective life of an institution is dependent upon several factors. First, there must be accepted means of securing new members. Some organizations, such as the Shakers, did not face up to this challenge and soon passed out of existence. Usually there are two sources of new members, - children of present members and recruits from the outside. Second, once the new member is secured he must be carefully indoctrinated in order that he might measure up to the expectation, norms and values of the group.[12] Third, there is a need to provide adequate leadership so that the institution may be perpetuated. This usually includes methods of securing leaders, identifying them and their relationships to the institution, placing them in proper places of leadership and policing the ranks to rid the group of defectors in leadership, if this is possible. Fourth, the institution must develop an identity with its people so that even the smallest symbolization will be sufficient to show belongingness. Thus, the name of a publishing house on literature is all that is needed by many to signify whether it is adequate for their institutional use. Loyalty to slogans, mottoes and catchy expressions also helps people who have little more inclination than a cursory glance to accept or reject a vast bulk of information or material. How many ministers read their mail by reading the return address on the envelope? The ultimate in this identity sought for the institution is when a person is able to determine all his religious reactions by reading the labels. The fifth necessary factor of institutional effectiveness is outreach. The institution must serve the immediate needs of its members and justify its existence by serving others as well. Thus missionary efforts are begun, various charities established, projected programs for the future offered. The extent to which groups will go to establish this feeling of outreach is seen by the church home for the aged that would not accept two members of any one church no matter what the individual need might be. It wanted to be sure that as many churches as possible had a personal outreach interest in the home's support. There is another home for the aged that has preachers on its board but no professional social workers. The preachers may not know anything about social work but they help to tie this auxiliary organization to the main institution. A final factor for institutional effectiveness is the calling together in mass meetings of the faithful followers. American rapid transportation and affluent society make these meetings not only possible but huge enterprises indeed.

Four points of summary seem necessary at this point. First, the larger institution actually becomes a complex cluster of satelite institutions which supplement its goals, ideals and views. Second, the point of all these efficiency factors is to get the individual member to identify himself with the group in a major part of his conscious life. This infusion with value gives the institution greater stability and deeper social integration. This transforms it from a mere tool into something considered an end in itself.[13] Once it becomes an end in itself the value is hypostatized in the institutional form. Third, the need to perpetuate itself leads to praising its own virtues in sort of a pious narcissism; it also leads to denouncing that which seems to be its greatest threat. The greatest threat often is not the group or groups with contradictory views or most remote in historical context but the group which is nearest to it. Thus you have the dismal picture of brothers scrapping among themselves while a common enemy

[12]Roucek, op. cit., p. 69.

[13]Broom and Selznick, op. cit.. . 239.

may go unopposed. Fourth, the institutional elements are largely cultural while the content of the institution is not necessarily so. We talk, for instance, of the New Testament Church. However, we have democratic elections of officials which reflect the democratic culture of America of the past two hundred years.

II

Thus far the matter of the origin and perpetuation of institutional structures has been presented. The logical question that remains is: "Where does this concern Christian unity?" The answer is to be found not so much in the fact of institutionalization but in the human actions that often result within the institutional context. It is so easy to transfer the question from the content of the structure to the structure itself, - the container for the contained. It is so easy to overlook consecrated action for structural similarity. In short, men begin to promote the institutional structure, which we have found to be cultural and temporary, instead of the content of that structure which is timeless and eternal. A good illustration of this occured in Oklahoma in the CROP program. There was one religious group that had never given much, if anything, to CROP. Finally two years ago, one of the ladies in their church wrote to a missionary of theirs stationed in Hong Kong asking what his evaluation of the program was. He wrote back a most interesting three page letter. The first two pages told how this was an organization sponsored by the liberal and apostate branch of the Protestant Church, how its members associated with the National Council of Churches and how they were far removed from the practice of primitive Christianity. On the third page of his letter he said that their church did not have a relief program, that CROP was feeding the hungry in the name of Jesus Christ and that it was a tremendous program worthy of their support. What a dilemma this man faced, - inappropriate institutional structure, superlative content and action. How carefully he had to justify his own institutional position before according due respect and regard for the good work of others.

The earliest barrier to Christian Unity encountered in the process of institutionalization is usually found in the emerging personality conflicts among leaders. Hoult has said:[14]

> In their early stages most religious movements have no authority to decide what is right and what is true. Except for the prophets, each individual's conscience is the only standard. Such an individualistic approach to authority very often leads to controvery, which may not only impede the promulgation of their collective message but may endanger the group's very existence. The problem is usually solved by spelling out lines of command, designating accepted spokesman and setting minimal requrement for group membership.

Though the several groups that seek association to form the institution may have many things in common they do not share leadership in common. If there is to be one group out of several there must be singular leadership. Immediately the question arises as to who shall lead. Although we may not like to admit it, petty ambitions, interpersonal jealousies, small struggles for power are quick to arise. You see, the leadership of human institutions is still human. The leaders may not admit that they are motivated by such carnal desires; they may mask these behind a facade of righteous criticism of others. The struggle for power is characteristic of human groups. History shows the truth of this. Power struggle has been common in the political movements of

[14]Hoult, op. cit. p. 74.

our country, such as the Populist movement, in labor unions, in lodges, in business. History also shows that the church has not been exempt. Witness the constant power struggle in the Roman Church.

If we were honest with ourselves, we could see it in the difficulties that have afflicted our own movement. It began as early as 1832 when the followers of Stone and Campbell could not agree. Certain of the Stoneites took a divergent path and became the New-Light Christians. Since that day various personalities have rallied followers about themselves. Another classic example of the personality centeredness of the Movement can be seen in Benjamin Franklin. He was a powerful leader in the second generation of our people. He was sure that he was to be the spiritual successor to Alexander Campbell. Dr. Frank Marshall told in his classes the incident reported to him by a relative who was present with Franklin when the news of Campbell's death was brought in. Franklin rolled on the floor crying out: "Woe is me. Now Campbell's mantle falls upon me." But, somehow, it did not work out that way. Issac Errett became the powerful personality through the pages of the Christian Standard.

Such personality play for position did not end with the 1906 split. How about the minister of a rather large church who supported a college with great zeal, invited its teachers to speak from his pulpit and saw to it that the college was in the church budget for a substantial amount. He let the hint drop, and not too subtly, that he would be available to be on the faculty someday. When the man died whom he hoped to replace he was not called to fill the position; another was given the coveted task. Immediately he began to make charges in his pulpit against this particular college. He refused to admit its faculty or administration to his pulpit. He saw to it that the budget item was removed. It was not coincident that his detection of heresy came upon his own personal disappointment. Or again, how about the man who appeared one day at his alma mater and delivered an ultimatum: "Fire three professors on your faculty or I will start another college in a nearby town and drive you out of existence." They didn't and he did. Today, some years later, the institution that he founded may not be aware of the personal animosity that entered into its founding. Here it exists, however; it is a competing institution and it must forward its own ends today no matter how ignoble its origin may have been or how rooted in the selfish and egotistical feelings of its founder. Consider again the minister who led a congregation in following one of the institutionalized national convention and denounced the other. I asked him the basis of his judgment and what it would take to get him to support both conventions. He said: "I have been asked to speak several times at one of the conventions but have never been asked to speak at the other. If they would ask me to speak at their convention I would support it too." This is personality and leadership pure and simple, - maybe not so pure either. It is egotism rearing its head but putting on a mask of righteousness and the mien of a crusader. Such illustrations are not isolated. Probably you can recall others that would make this list virtually infinite for in the time it would take to recount them others would have asserted themselves in seeking leadership, prestige and status. Institutions must have human leadership. Woe to that institution that has leadership tinged with personal ambition. Double woe to that institution whose leaders do not or will not recognize this but feel just and righteous in their own self assertions.

Another development from the institutional structure is the need to maintain the structure itself. Put another way, there is a vested interest which must be saved, served and

perpetuated. Broom and Selznick say:[15]

> The various elements of the association have a stake in its continued existence. Furthermore, the aims of the organization usually necessitate a certain degree of permanence and stability. There is a need to accommodate internal interests and adapt to outside forces in order to maintain the organization as a going concern, minimize risks and achieve long-run rather than short-run objectives. There is a tendency for relatively loose groupings of likeminded people to become integrated and stabilized by formal associations. These associations tend to develop a vested interest in continued existence, thus introducing a conservative note into the movement.

The vested interests of institutions usually involve buildings, salaried jobs, subsidiary institutions, and endowments. All of these begin and end with money and man's most sensitive nerve is still in his billfold. Once an institution is established there begins the furious race of perpetuating it and building its investments. Publishing companies have material for sale, colleges have support to raise, buildings to build, and students to recruit, missionaries have funds to raise and passage to buy, conventions have programs to promote, agencies have salaried people to pay. There are just two sources of supporting these interests: people already within likeminded groups or people who might be converted and brought in from other groups. Unfortunately many find it easier to prey upon likeminded groups than to seek to convert others.

A second factor is that there is a scarcity of resources. There is never enough to satisfy the insatiable institutional structure which grows with support and in its growth creates new demands for additional support. When faced with a situation like this man usually engages in one of three disjunctive processes by which he drives himself away from other men.[16] He enters into competition in which he tries to get there first for the most before his competitor can do the same. Second, he may enter into a contraventive process by which he tries to keep his opposing institution from attaining the goal. Third, he may enter into conflict by which one person or group seeks to destroy another. A quick glance assures us that all of these methods have been used to forward the vested interests of the institutions among us. The competition is very keen for the sale of merchandise and the solicitation of funds. How well the local pastor is aware of these competitive pleas that come by mail and in person in continuous procession to the church office.

Within the last six months I have visited with a minister of a large Independent congregation and the minister of a similar size Cooperative congregation. The Independent minister told me of the great number of calls his church office had from the direct support missionaries. He said that they were becoming so frequent and so diverse that the official board of the church was about to despair. "Surely," he said, "there must be some means of relief from these increasing numbers of people who are looking to churches for their support." This is only another illustration of vested interests that must find support. The Cooperative minister had another problem. He was seeking to plan a school of missions or world outreach program for his congregation during six Sundays in mid-winter. He told me what was distressing to him. When he sought any help from the agencies, all he got were ever increasing volumes

[15] op. cit., pp. 238, 239.

[16] For a complete discussion of this concept see Fichter, Sociology, pp. 223-246.

of promotional materials promoting existing agencies. He said with all conviction, "They send that stuff out and write with the attitude that if you just hand it out you have sufficiently enlightened and inspired people in world outreach. You would think these programs were the total outreach effort." He then continued by suggesting that he was tired of such bland assumption and presumption and felt there must be a better way. Once again the vested interests of what exist are putting out their demands. When one publishes a new brochure all others must, also, to stay in the race. And of the march of direct support missionaries and the publishing of promotional pamphlets there is no end. The competition feeds upon itself.

Contravention also is used. I heard recently of a family who moved to a city where there was one congregation under the name Christian Church. When the pastor called on this family they told him that they had been urged by their former Christian pastor to attend another denomination in that town rather than the Christian Church. It seems that one of these was Independent and one was Cooperative. It makes no difference which was which in this particular instance because this example can be duplicated either direction again and again. The idea is that if one group cannot keep the loyalty of this family they are more willing to see it go to the Baptists or Congregationalists than to go to the other side. This dog-in-the-manger attitude is tragic but all too common.

Third, people among us have actually resorted to conflict to resolve their differences. Church lock-outs, church splits and church lawsuits all speak of this. What other reason is there for a church lawsuit other than protection of vested interest, vested dollar interest? Conflicts in the courts is shameful and has been since the New Testament Corinthian Church.

These disjunctive elements enter our discussion of unity very closely. Disjunctive actions drive people apart. They make gaps between opposites. Unity seeks to bring men together. Until we are willing to face up to the fact that the struggle to maintain investments and vested interests is with us we will go on widening the gap and dreamily living in a fantasy world of idyllic unity that someday might come. The cultural value of competition coupled with personal interests are deeply entrenched in our church life!

A third problem posed by institutionalization is a more subtle and deceptive one. It arises because too often people fail to analyze their premises with logical precision. As a result they come to feel that their own system and the plan of God are identical. They also come to believe that anyone who does not subscribe to their particular viewpoint is not a part of God's plan. It is at this point that a logical fallacy so easily arises. Probably a simple illustration outside our particular context will make this clear. Suppose there is a group of men who decided that to show their love for God they will sacrifice and let their beards grow. In this case their wives are making a greater sacrifice than their husbands. Nonetheless they do this. All is well until these men either individually or collectively begin to look about them and take note of the persons who are <u>not</u> wearing beards. The next step is to say: "If I wear a beard to show honor to God and you don't wear a beard, you must not be showing honor to God." The trouble is that this conclusion commits a logical fallacy; it does not necessarily follow. However, those who do not analyze their logical premises can become very smug and complacent with themselves and filled with judgment of others. I am not challenging individual rightness to claim to be doing the will of God, nor indeed institutional rightness to be doing the will of God. I am saying, however, that no one institution can claim the universal rightness of doing

the will of God. Yet, this is the claim implied in many claims if indeed it is not openly professed. People develop a pride in institutional forms to take the place of self sacrifice and self devotion.

If man can ever convince himself and a few significant others that his particular system is identified exclusively with the plan of God his human institution has virtually undergone an apotheosis. His promotion of his program becomes a holy crusade. Does this ever occur in reality? Hoult says: [17] "Once an authority system is begun those having power tend to assert that the final word has been spoken, that all truths are revealed and that they especially are the possessor of the divine fetish, as it were; they feel a universal rightness because they have attained an individual claim for right actions."

Our literature, past and present, is full of illustrations of this point. Often our convention speeches are tinged with it. Sermons from the pulpit ring with the assertions of exclusive rightness. One minister went so far to say to me personally: "If I was not sure that I was not absolutely right and that others were wrong I would quit the ministry this very moment." The basis of the conversation had not been doctrine or theology but organizational structure. We see it so often in the sly statement, New Testament Christianity, which is really an American version of many forms and practices which people seek by this means to identify with the primitive faith. Again we see it in advertising which asserts that the following are the New Testament Churches. If people can be made to shift their thinking and become logically blind at this point the institutional structure may be justified and therein proper. We see it again in news releases in religious journals that all the loyal churches, nondenominational churches or Christian churches in an area met, or formed an evangelistic association or held a rally. The logical implication of such statements are exclusive institutional identification with God, and basically judgmental and egotistical. What's more, they make a basis of unity impossible. There is no end to the good that can be done if people do not care who gets the credit for it. But, institutional structure demands that proper credit be given so that the institutional ego may be satisified and its own importance asserted. Unity is not going to be promoted as long as such inferential remarks and statements are made claiming rightness and godlikeness.

A further extension of this problem comes in the doctrinaire attitude of mind. This is the personality characteristic that makes all differences of opinion differences in kind and not differences in degree. All moves for change are looked upon not as tactical moves but questions of principle. We see this in the zealous people equate free enterprise as they understand it with pure Americanism and real Christianity. If a person believes in any type of economic system other than the one these people spell out exactly he is looked upon not as different kind of an American but as being un-American. This also is true in many of the institutional forms. If a person has a different idea about how to do something he is considered to be not a different type of Christian, or differing in degree; he is looked upon and called unChristian. The painting of the world into two-tone black and white becomes as tragic as it is unreal. However, it is the easiest and most deceptive way to promote an institution. This, too, destroys a hope for unity.

The fourth problem resulting from institutionalization as it refers to unity is the polarization of interests. Polarization refers to the grouping of ideas about two contradictory centers. It means more than this, however. It means to give reference to

[17] Hoult, op. cit., p. 75.

one pole in its entirety because we know of it in some of its specific content. The person who allows this to happen often looks for small identifying labels by which to categorize other persons or things. Thus the worth of the Bible School material is to be judged solely by the one who holds the copyright, a man is judged by his alma mater, a benevolent institution is adjudged worthy of support or unworthy by its national identification, a missionary is warmly accepted or coldly refused a speaker's platform because of his label. Quickly whole congregations, colleges, programs are written off by the simple statement, "They are not one of us." Only when there is extensive polarization is such action possible. People think in terms of black and white, identifying their own institutional ties as white. Now this process saves time because one must think on only a minute part of an argument. If one once accepts the basic rightness of his own institutional position, by positive inference anyone away from his position is not right. The contradictory opinions are truly poles apart. Bible verses have been quoted to justify this polarization: "can two walk together except they be agreed"; "be not unequally yoked with unbelievers"; "what communion has light with darkness"; and the old standby test of virtually every schism of the church, "come ye out from among them and be ye separate". These verses are good in context but to use them to justify schism between two human viewpoints concerning how to serve God is prostituting their meaning and turning them to base usage.

When polarization has taken place any association between the polar extremes is precluded. Each group keeps within its own ego-reinforcing orbit. Indeed, often even communication is kept at a minimal level. One group reads one paper; the other reads the other. Only when editors are willing and able to print significant articles simultaneously or when news stories are sufficiently startling to merit attention in both organs of communication is there a cross fertilization of ideas. The persons who are willing to meet in assemblies such as these may be showing some interest in bridging the polarized gap unless one is motivated in attendance merely to intensify his own position and prejudice. Labor negotiators and international diplomats do all in their power to prevent polarization for they know the task of bridge building once this has been done is well nigh insurmountable.

III

What are the solutions that may be offered in the church to avoid the problems that we have discussed? First, it should be clearly understood that we should not hope to avoid institutionalization. This is as much a part of human organization as the emergence of leadership and purpose. Indeed the institutional forms may last long after the purpose which called a group into being has been achieved or abandoned. Also, we must be sure that we do not commit a companion error of assuming that all others have man-made forms while we ourselves have the one true and divine pattern. How egotistical it is to tell someone: "You go on serving God in your way and we will go on serving him in His way." There is not a church among us, even among the most straightlaced, that would recognize itself if it filtered out all the elements of expediency it has put into its structure from the 19th and 20th Centuries. We would quit arguing about which is the right Sunday School literature; there wouldn't be any literature. We would not argue whether we should call it church school or Sunday school; there would be neither one. We would not be arguing about whether there should be musical instruments in the church building and if so which ones; there would be no instruments. Probably we would not be able to have a congregational meeting with a demo-

cratic vote to decide the issues. Why can't we see that these are man made institutional expediencies that serve their day and may pass away to be followed by some more worthy or useful servant. If all our emphasis is placed upon these things in recognizing brethern what happens when they no longer exist. Throughout history the institutional forms have been an outward scaffolding around the church developing in the midst of the believers. How foolish to spend so much time in criticizing the scaffolding to the harm of the building within. Eventually the scaffolding will be stripped away but the church will remain. The best way to see this is to read the history of our people just 100 years ago. Consider the burning issues of that day as reflected in the editorials and the new emphasis. See how many of these hot issues of yesterday have cooled to dust and ashes. Preachers and people who fell out over them, who became enbittered, divisive and schismatic would find today they were fighting for a temporary social expedient not for the real and abiding nature of the church. In brief, they were struggling over sociological issues and had been deluded into thinking or had misled themselves into believing it to be theological issues.

The second consideration for us today is to realize that we are not going to do away with structure that already exists merely by shutting our eyes and hoping it will go away or by passing some sort of resolution against it. Many of these structures are deeply rooted economically, emotionally and functionally in our corporate life. Perhaps there are intermediate steps by which the gaps so often apparent may be bridged. Years ago the founders of the Federal Council of Churches faced this problem. Their answer was to recognize all structures of those corporate bodies who sought admission. Later this policy was carried into the World Council of Churches. Perhaps you are distressed to see all the visible symbols of rank, status and prestige at the World Council Meetings. Perhaps you would say that it would be better if each representative would lay aside his vestments and come in some simple, common habit. I suggest to you that there is greater chance of this occurring if first they meet as they are and in their meeting recognize the shame of their division than if they had never met at all. Some may be critical of the World Council program but I suggest to you that they have made more effective progress toward unity than we have with the schism that are within our own structure. The next time you think about the World Council delegates who come from half way around the world to consider the weighty matters of unity think about your own little baliwick with supposedly Christian preachers, at least in the Campbell tradition, who will not meet in the same ministerial alliance or meeting. The next time you read of the World Council berating itself for schism think of our churches in the cities that proudly advertise their schism in the church ads on Saturday night. Whether we like to admit it or not any move toward unity involves existing structures and readjustments must be made to be sure no one loses, at least in the beginning.

The third consideration is to keep the lines of communication open. Maybe we will find out there is more unity possible among us than we ever supposed. For years the Army, Navy, and Air Force felt that they had to have separate numbering systems of parts and supplies. This often led to serious supply problems, duplication and waste. A few years ago a gigantic project of cross referencing began to unify the armed forces. One of the first things discovered was that though they all scrapped among themselves they were fighting for the same country. A second fact they discovered was how much material they used was really common to all of them except under different labels.

The task of relabeling has been going on for ten years in the defense department. There are still little kingdom building generals and admirals but there is a unified command emerging from the three separate institutions. We as Christians might take a lesson from this. We too might see that when we are not fighting each other we have the same king. We too might find out that much of what we do and use is of common nature, origin and usage.

One word of caution must be made. Proximity of body does not imply communication. This has often amazed me in counselling with married couples who are having marital trouble. They may have lived together for some time. Each one feels there is a problem. If either one can speak separately to the counsellor he can make a pretty good case for himself. The interesting situation, however, is to get them to sit down together in a room with just one other person there and talk. Slowly, but with increasing acceleration, they find that the things which they mentioned to others so convincingly seem to fall apart. The other may have reasons. He may profess to be willing to compromise. Both often come to feel really foolish before the session is over. What they had magnified to themselves in self pity or ego-satisfaction and what they had so eloquently expressed to others really seems to have no body at all. Maybe for the first time in their married life they have begun to communicate. Something of this very human illustration can benefit us here as well. At the consultation in Wichita and again at Tulsa I had persons from both sides of the fence visit with me. One, an Independent friend of long standing, whispered into my ear the story of how a state secretary had undercut him and caused him to lose a chance at a good paying church. The state secretary was present in the auditorium so I suggested we both go and talk to him. This suggestion stunned my friend. Quickly he left to find another sympathizing ear into which to unburden his wounded ego. You see, he was present in body but there was little communication. The story could be nearly duplicated on the other side by a Cooperative friend who came telling of how a certain independent was becoming a virtual bishop in the city. The suggested meaning had its negative effect on him as well. Communication means a meeting of the minds of men. Often we fear to have our minds meet anything for fear that our cherished emotions and emotional responses will perish. The wisdom of Jesus' observation concerning seeking out a brother against whom you have some wrong feeling seems more apropros every day. It is too bad we can preach about it yet cannot practice it even at a consultation called for the express purpose of Christian unity.

The fourth consideration we must ever bear in mind is the human element that emerges in leadership. T. H. Johnson, long-time president of Manhattan Bible College, used a very clever strategy when some student or alumnus criticized the college. He would ask the person who reported the critical conversation to ask a few questions in return. Some of these questions were: What was this person's grade point average when he left school? Did he owe the school any money? Was he ever on probation? Did he have personal problems with his teachers? You would be surprised how often the criticism turned out to be nothing but an aggressive face saving assertion to cover wounded pride, personal frustration or hidden animosity. The New Testament is replete with inspired warnings to beware men who make traffic of holy things for personal gain, who are peddlers of the word of God, who would promote themselves beyond even the Lord whom they professed to serve. Each of us would do well before we espouse anyone's cause to see clearly the basis for the cause. We can never be too cautious about following someone who is off on a holy crusade; we may find that he is more interested in the accolade

of his followers and the wearing of his medals than he is in the winning of a combat for his professed king. Especially do we need to watch this most human proclivity in ourselves. We too may have wounded pride, personal slight; we too may not have the recognition we feel should be accorded to us; we too, in being envious of the position of others, seek for personal reason to degrade them or upgrade ourselves unduly. The personal factor in institutional forming, structure and control is diffiuclt to ascertain. Thus we must be ever more vigilant that some hurt feeling, wounded ego, neglected soul does not convert his personal problem to an external one of divisive import.

Fifth, I feel that we need to keep two thoughts in mind from Jesus. One is that Jesus mentioned the word church in the inspired record. He did not set forth any form or structure that it should follow in its development. How wisely he acted in this. Each generation has new methods, techniques and needs. Each locality has its own peculiar characteristics. The communal structure of the Jerusalem church did not fit the hustle and business of Corinth. The development of the Ephesian eldership did not proceed apace in Athens or on the Island of Crete. Men differ. Jesus knew well that to crystallize his teaching in a set institutional structure would be to create it for a day that was passing before it could be begun. The structure is important to carry the message but the structure is not the message nor indeed is it inseparable from it. There was a church long before we had true-to-the-Bible literature or a Brotherhook Publishing Company. I rather suppose the church will outlive both of these business corporations. If they had their origin long after the church did and if they stand a chance of perishing before the church perishes and if they reach but a tiny segment of those today who look to God for guidance making an issue of them is both foolish and futile. I think it is immensely significant that the time Jesus mentioned the church has been given at least four different interpretations to justify human formed institutions that have developed in the course of history.

The final note from Jesus is the one cited at the beginning. Change the scenery just a little. Take out the well and dusty roadside. Remove the sinful woman. Put modern clothes upon the conversationalists. Let them meet the Master in a hall just like this one. Let them be men of study, attainment, influence and pulpit ability; they can retain their sinfulness. Let them come up to the Lord of the now-wounded hands and ask in that same tone that she used to excuse herself: "Say, Lord, which is best - to do Independently or Cooperatively?" Who knows but what the side once riven should gush forth again in anguish and that the hands once crucified should bleed anew. And His word then as now would set it all in proper perspective: "Not this or that, here or there, but in spirit and in truth." Spirit and truth, - two words to judge. In the light of these two words the institutions take their proper perspective. Whatever promotes the spirit of God, whatever develops his truth among men, this is right. In shame we return to our structures. Now they must be instruments of righteousness and truth not frameworks of self-justification. And we find that the task thus to convert them and ourselves shall take us from now on.

# THE HOLY SPIRIT
# AND
# THE UNITY OF CHRISTIANS

*By*

*Cecil K. Thomas*

# THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE UNITY OF CHRISTIANS

Introduction:

"It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to write to you concerning this consultation." Can we expect to come to such a conclusion here? The problem before us in this paper demands that we make some attempt at such an evaluation. In the light of this fact, I would like to discuss with you the role of the Holy Spirit in the relationships among what are sometimes called "autonomous" congregations.

First, we must work out some basic definitions. One of the terms currently being used to describe the status of our congregations is "autonomous." This word is variously understood and applied. On the one hand, it has become a rallying cry for independency in every congregation. Each, it is asserted, has the right of self-determination. No other congregation or agency of any sort has the right to interfere in the internal affairs of the local church. On the other hand, the term has become a whipping boy to chastise those who refuse to participate in certain cooperative enterprises, particularly those causes so dear to the heart of the one who is denouncing the autonomy of local churches.

The actual practice of local autonomy, however, makes strange bedfellows. The insistence of self-determination sometimes leads to radical or modified independency in missionary, benevolent, and educational activities. It appears likewise in the insistence upon the right of the local congregation to examine and ordain candidates for the ministry of the whole church, thus making the local congregation the judge for the whole church of the fitness of any person for the ministry. Or again, it may take the form of open membership, with a local congregation accepting into its membership the unimmersed and thus, in principle, declaring itself to be the arbiter of membership even over other congregations. The actual practice of local autonomy without balancing factors will lead to chaos and fragmentation.

The fact is that our Christian Churches have never, in basic principle, subscribed to the practice of local autonomy. The basic convictions out of which our churches grew, denied to any person or congregation the ultimate authority in Christian faith and life. The assertion that the Scriptures are the norm for the church's faith and life, and the adoption of the confession that Jesus Christ is Son of God and Savior as the only statement of faith required for membership, places the ultimate authority in God and not in the local congregation. A much more accurate term for our principle in its ideal form would be Hendrik Kraemer's term, "Christonomy" (A Theology of the Laity, Philadelphia: 1958, p. 153.) What we have said in principle is that both the Christian and the church stand under the authority of Christ. Some levels of the church's faith and life are so clearly prescribed by the authority of Christ that there is no dispute about these matters. On other levels, no Scriptural criterion is found by which to determine policies and in these each congregation holds the greatest of freedom. On still other levels, however, there is great ambiguity so that the balance between freedom and responsibility in the local congregation is difficult to maintain. It is to the particular problem of inter-congregational relationships at the level of ambiguity that we wish to give attention in this paper.

It is necessary, also, to come to some understanding of the way in which we conceive the work of the Holy Spirit. Even the mention of the Holy Spirit has been unfamiliar to our people at many times and in many places during our history.

There have, of course, been exceptions to this and to these we shall turn in a moment. Why have we placed so much emphasis upon recapturing the genius of the New Testament church and still neglected this very prominent feature of New Testament thought? I believe the answer lies in two areas--the environmental and the theological. These two areas have interacted upon one another quite effectively to stifle any major interest in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Our founding fathers were rationalists in a distinctive sense. They were convinced that man had been endowed with reason and that his religious responses should be intelligent and reasonable. In the Scriptures was to be found a revelation of God to man so plain that anyone who studied the Bible with an alert mind could learn the will of God and follow his purpose. Hence, there was no need of guidance of the Holy Spirit.

A second influence that militated against an interest in the Holy Spirit was the excessive claims made for the Holy Spirit in the revivals along the frontier. The exaggeration of the influence of the Spirit, the bitterness of attitude among Christians, and the anti-intellectualism on the frontier drove the early leaders of our movement radically to avoid anything that might smack of such excesses.

There have been, however, areas where a real interest has been displayed in the Holy Spirit. In the thought of Stone, Campbell, and Scott, the Holy Spirit was believed to act in conversion, only through the Scriptures. They denied the validity of any other influence upon the unbeliever and insisted that he needed no such power. Man was as capable of believing as he was of disbelieving. It must be kept in mind, however, that these men insisted that the Holy Spirit himself actually worked through the hearing of the Scriptures. They never equated the Spirit and the word. The role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is quite another thing. The writings of Stone, Campbell, and Scott indicate their belief that the Spirit does act directly in the lives of Christians for enlightenment, nurture, and spiritual growth.

The point that is of special interest for our study is that practically all the discussion about the Holy Spirit has been related to the Spirit's activity in the individual and almost never to the role of the Spirit in the corporate life of the church. Consequently, I believe, if we are to discuss the role of the Holy Spirit in inter-congregational relationships we must in some measure break new ground. Certain assumptions must be made if the subject is to have any relevance. In the first place, we must assume that the Holy Spirit is active in the world today. We cannot settle for the conclusion that, after having inspired the biblical writers, there was no further place for the action of the Spirit. We must assume, accordingly, that the Spirit is active today for guidance, sanctification, and spiritual development within believers. In this assumption we are wholly in accord with our founding fathers. We must however, go beyond this to the assumption that the Spirit is active within the church for help and guidance in the things that pertain to her life and faith.

I. Analysis of the Problem from the Biblical Data.

The church of the New Testament period faced its problems, when it saw them whole, with the intent of discovering the mind of Christ and fashioning itself according to that mind. The result was, strangely enough, that as it looked back upon these decisions and actions, it was convinced that its deliberations and decisions had been overshadowed and guided by the Holy Spirit. Let us look at three specific situations that are relevant to our discussion of the role of the Holy Spirit in our inter-congregational relationships.

The first that I would mention relates especially to the problems of individualism within a local congrega-

tion. The situation to which Paul addressed himself in I Corinthians 12-14 is one of radical independency in the name of the Holy Spirit. The various gifts communicated to persons within the Corinthian church were being used by each member as a private possession, to be exercised at his own will and for his benefit. We are too familiar with the situation to need description of it here. Paul's instructions in chapter 14 for a proper and orderly worship service give us some idea of the confusion that had arisen. He ordered that in the worship service only two or three prophets should prophesy and they should speak one at a time. No one should speak in a tongue unless there was someone to interpret. The final blow to this individualism was Paul's demand that women be silent in the church. The inference must be drawn that the women had been so anxious to speak that they appeared to assume that the word of God had originated with them or that they were the only ones whom it had reached (14:36).

Paul's basic solution to the problem is that each member should recognize the church as the body of Christ and should recognize others mutually as members of that body. Furthermore, each should recognize that his gift had come to him from one and the same Spirit that had given gifts to others. There must, therefore, be no pride, arrogance, or individualism, but each should use his spiritual gift for the highest good of the whole community. Standing in judgment over every member of the church and over every gift to be exercised in the church was the fact that each had confessed Jesus as Lord. Every gift of the Spirit must, therefore, be brought into subjection to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and should be used for the mutual good of the whole community. Paul's solution to the Corinthian problem speaks eloquently to our problems of independency, cooperation and unity.

A second incident that bears upon our problem is the Jerusalem conference described in Acts 15. Paul's first efforts at mission to the Gentiles had been so successful that the Jewish Christians saw the possibility of radical change in the character of the church. If the Gentiles were to be admitted without first submitting to Jewish regulations, the church would become a community of faith, cut off in large part from its Jewish roots. In the conference, the evidence presented to determine what should be done was largely what God had himself done. Peter began by declaring that the Holy Spirit had been given to Gentiles just as it had been to the Jews. Consequently, he argued, both Jews and Gentiles will be saved by the grace of God. Barnabas and Paul then related the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles. Elsewhere these same signs and wonders are attributed to the Holy Spirit. Finally, James cited a passage from Amos declaring that the Gentiles also would share in the rebuilt dwelling of David. Elsewhere, in many places, such statements from the prophets are cited as having been spoken by the Holy Spirit. After the deliberations of the group, a letter was composed concluding with the statement, "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things. . . ." (15:28).

How did the group arrive at the conclusion that their decision was also the will of the Holy Spirit? I believe that it came through their consensus about what the Spirit had done in the past and now willed should be done. The conclusion is relevant regardless of our judgment about the character of the incident. The Spirit had, through the preaching of the gospel, reached beyond Judaism to the Gentiles. The response of the Gentiles, then, had obviously been according to the will of the Spirit who had once again broken out of the supposedly fixed patterns and had sought all men whoever they might be. Thus, the Spirit had by its action demonstrated what the will of God would be.

The third of the passages to which

I would call attention is Matthew 18:15-20. In this passage, the church is seeking the solution to a problem of discipline. The person who has sustained the injury is to take the initiative in seeking reconciliation with the offender. When this cannot be accomplished, others are to be brought in to persuade the offender of his need for reconciliation. If this is unsuccessful, the church by its consensus is to consider him as an outsider and no longer as a brother. But, on what grounds can the church presume to take such action? It acts upon the assurance that in what it does it is acting in behalf of God and is expressing his will. But how can it be so assured? The club, I believe, is to be found in verses 19-20: "Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them." Nothing is said here about the Holy Spirit; yet the arrival at a consensus of judgment while deliberating in the name of Jesus is almost identical with the procedure described in the Jerusalem conference of Acts 15. In this passage the church sees herself to be at one with Christ, gathering in his name, and having him in her midst. In such an atmosphere of seeking the will of Christ, testing the church's judgment against what it knows of the will of God through the revelation in Christ, and acting in humility under that judgment, it feels itself to be able to speak with the voice of God himself.

To come to such a judgment and to act in such a capacity is a fearful and awesome thing. The church in any age, when it declares that it speaks by the Spirit must do so with the solemn realization that it is human and fallible. It must never become dogmatic about its decisions and pronouncements but it must await the verdict of experience to determine whether it has imposed its own sinful interests into the situation and so has distorted the will of the Spirit. This, it seems to me, will be the basis upon which we must operate in our inter-congregational relationships.

II. The Application of these Principles

1. How will we go about the application of these concepts to our contemporary situation? In the first place, we must seek above everything else the mind of Christ. This mind of Christ is not to be found in some esoteric contemplation, waiting for the revelation of new truth; neither is it to be sought in some simple quotation of a passage of Scripture nor even in a vague generalization about the love of God. It is to be found only as we bring ourselves face to face with Christ as he is presented to us in the Scriptures. It is through a serious personal encounter with the Scriptures and an understanding of Christ as Lord of the church that we will begin to know the mind of Christ.

In making such a stipulation as this, we are not at all departing from our main thesis that the unity of the church comes from the Spirit of God. The testimony of the Scriptures and the faith of the historic church confirm the fact that the Holy Spirit always bears witness to Christ. Only when Jesus Christ is central in faith can that faith be said to arise from the leading of the Spirit. The instinct that led our people to set the simple confession of Jesus as Son of God, Savior, and Lord as the only essential statement of faith was a thoroughly valid conviction. Yet our use of that insight has been seriously endangered from time to time by a perversion. The confession of Jesus as Lord in the first century church had the background of two major concepts. One of these was the Hebraic recognition of God as the Lord because he was Creator and Savior. He was Lord of the Covenant which he had made with Israel and hence to him was owed unconditional and joyous obedience. The Hellenistic background of the term Lord was that of the emperor who claimed divine honors and demanded recognition of

his absolute sovereignty. Against these backgrounds, the New Testament confession of Jesus as Lord was not a narration of facts which one believed about him, but an oath of allegiance to him as Savior and Lord of life. The nature of this oath is highly dramatized by its association with baptism as a death, burial, and resurrection with Christ and as an entrance into new life with him.

One of the theological issues that has plagued our internal relationships has arisen just at this point. Those among us who may be called conservative (and this is sometimes equated with "independent") insist that the so-called liberals do not mean what we mean when they speak of Jesus as Lord. We have tended to insist that they spell out in specific terms what they believe about him. On the other hand, those of us who are sometimes called liberals (and this is often equated with "cooperatives") have participated in the ecumenical movement and have been willing to give assent to the creedal statement demanded of those who are members of the World Council of Churches. The fact that this statement is being strengthened toward a sharper delineation of the traditional doctrine of the Trinity has caused concern among many of us. All of this occurs at a time when we censure our more conservative brethren for forcing upon us too precise a theology behind the confession of faith in Jesus as Lord. Thus, the issue has come to revolve around what we believe about Jesus more than what allegiance we give to him.

The issue thus raised is foreign to the main thrust of our movement. It certainly is true that one cannot give his unconditional loyalty to Jesus Christ unless he believes him to be worthy of such loyalty; but the formulation of creedal statements about him, whether written or unwritten, will not bring unity at the point where our founding fathers saw it, or where the New Testament concept of the Lordship of Christ focused it. It is true that only if Jesus Christ be uniquely God's Son, only if in him there is a real incarnation, can Christianity have its distinctive character. For the New Testament, the unity of the Church comes through the submission of every Christian to Jesus Christ as Lord. Some of the things that this submission demands are clear and are not points of controversy. At other points, however, the specific demands of obedience are not fully clear. If we are to seek unity among ourselves and within our congregations, we must recognize that where the demands of the Lordship of Jesus Christ are clear, we have no choice but loving obedience. Where there is no clarity, our every attitude and action must be brought under the judgment of what we know not only of the specific commands of Jesus but also of what we know of his mind and his spirit.

When Paul urges the Philippians to have the mind of Christ, he presents to them the experience of Christ which they already knew. The Johannine counterpart of Paul's account of the humiliation and death of Christ for us is the love of Christ demonstrated in his giving of himself for his disciples. Thus, to have the mind of Christ is to love so greatly that we will give our very lives for one another. We need to take seriously the radical demand of Jesus when he sets the test of discipleship, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35). Such love as this is not sentimental. It is "tough-minded", or to use Deitrich Benhoeffer's phrase, it is "costly grace." Such love, we in the Christian Churches need sadly to learn.

2. If we truly seek the mind of Christ and the leading of the Spirit, we must be willing for all of our attitudes, our institutions, and our structures to come under the severe judgment of the will and Spirit of Christ. No method of procedure nor

institution should take on a sacredness in its own self. Every such structure must stand the severe scrutiny that comes from the light of the Scriptures and the consecrated judgment of the church. Such scrutiny will mean, for example, that a congregation that chooses to act "independently" will examine itself carefully to see whether its independency is the best possible tool for the fulfillment of the will of Christ for the church, or whether it is a product of narrow exclusiveness or even laziness that seeks relief from the strenuous demands of being a Christian brother to him with whom one disagrees and of benevolence beyond its own locality. The "cooperative" congregation must examine itself to determine whether its passion is truly Christian brotherhood and the outreach of the church or whether it has made its agencies sacred structures that must be preserved regardless of their continuing efficacy.

Again, if we seek the leading of the Spirit of God, we may need to rethink whether the local congregation is the basic autonomous unit or whether the crucial unit may not be the individual Christian within a local congregation with his involvement in the whole church of Christ Jesus. If this be true, may not the Spirit lead us to allow far more freedom within local congregations for every member to participate in whatever phase of the life of the total church he may feel himself led to act, so long as he does it in a spirit of love and Christian commitment? Or may it not be that there is room for Christians to cooperate through forms which we do not now have in order to give expression to the dynamic that comes from the leading of the Spirit? We may need to awaken to the fact that in times past, the Spirit has led men into radically new paths. To presume that we have found all the avenues of service to Christ through the church presumes that God no longer acts creatively in his world and his church. It cannot be stressed too strongly, however, that if we are to take this renewed look at ourselves to learn how we stand according to the mind of Christ, all such criticism must be made, not from the outside and with a jaundiced eye, but from within the sincere love of the brethren, with a deep commitment to Christ, and a heartfelt desire that the will of God be done in all things.

3. If we permit ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit we must come to some kind of constructive action within a framework of unity. To say this does not assume that there will be a uniformity of structure or of action. I believe that anyone who today expects that all "independents" will become "cooperatives" or that all "cooperatives" will become "independents" is thoroughly deluded. The variations of thought and practice have embedded themselves too deeply in our thinking and loyalty for us to expect or even to hope that this might be accomplished. Heretofore, we seem to have felt that unity could come within only one kind of structure and could take only one form. Rather, we should recognize that the action of the Holy Spirit in the churches of the New Testament and the experiences of the church through the ages lead to the conclusion that one of the most glorious products of the Holy Spirit is a wide variety of expressions each giving its own vitality and emphasis, so that in many and various ways the gospel may be preached and Christians nurtured toward the maturity that is in Christ.

To turn to the more positive side of the issue, the leading of the Spirit will transform our attitudes toward one another. The breach between "cooperatives" and "independents" has been widened by the suspicion and accusation coming mutually from both sides. Suspicions have arisen because of false or half-true information. On the basis of these suspicions open accusations have been made, and the accusations have heightened the suspicions. This process has gone on in an ever-increasing cycle.

It is my conviction that the most formidable barrier to understanding and to some measure of cooperation among our various groups is that we have become deeply suspicious of one another's sincerity and motives. This is the blackest part of our sin. We have violated both the letter and the spirit of Jesus' charge that we should not judge lest we be judged by the same measure. We have reaped the harvest of our sin; for as we sit to talk together, we often harbor a secret fear that our words will be used against us, or while the other person may sound as if he were forthright in his statement, we feel that he is speaking with a serious mental reservation. This deep suspicion of motives and of sincerity has caused each of us to believe the worst of others. The result has been the duplication of agencies to do the same work, the planting of churches in competition with one another, and a strenuous attempt to win converts from one another. If this condemnation sounds too harsh, I ask you only to assess your own feelings when you learn that a particular congregation is wavering in its decision as to whether it will become wholly "cooperative" or wholly "independent." Each of us, whichever side of the aisle he may be on, has urged or heard his fellows urge that we "get our man in there" and we will have the church. Brethren, such things ought not to be.

We should be bowed down in shame and penitence; for our divisions and strife have brought upon us the chastisement of the Lord that Thomas Campbell saw and deplored in his day. He wrote, "What awful and distressing effects have these sad divisions produced! What aversions, what reproaches, what backbitings, what evil surmisings, what angry contentions, what enmities, what excommunications, and even persecution!!!" We should, in penitence, pray to God for forgiveness for our own inventions of strife. How penitent we should be for fragmented congregations, for character assassinations, for false accusations, for making the gospel of love a mockery, for law suits in the courts that have brought shame and disgrace on all who were involved, for personal ambitions that debase the humility that Christ instilled in his disciples! We should pray in deepest penitence, "For all these our sins and for many more, dear Father forgive us."

We may now, however, have come to the point where the strife can begin to subside if we will have it so. Tragic as it is, our congregations and agencies, both "independent" and "cooperative" have grown far apart. It may now be that the bitter tensions of the family feud can be alleviated. In many cases, there need be little or no competition since the lines of constituency and support have largely been sharply drawn. In these cases we should cease our quarreling and seek new dimensions of unity. If we would follow the leading of the Spirit, each of us would look to his own house to set it in order. He would in deep penitence ask forgiveness for his own guilt and that of the whole brotherhood of which he is a part. With such resolve we will, by the help of God's Spirit, seek the things that are honorable in the sight of all men. If we act in true penitence, a new spirit may come upon us and among us. Such a new start must begin with a willingness on the part of each to conduct himself so as to be worthy of trust. There must be no waiting for others to prove themselves worthy before we act. If we do wait, no kind of understanding will ever come. If we stir ourselves to recapture the spirit that Christ instilled in his disciples, we will have made a first step toward reconciliation.

As a second step in the direction of unity, though probably not the ultimate one, I would like to propose a concrete platform, at least for discussion, if not for action. I suggest a return to the basic principles of the Declaration and Address which we hold in common, and a revision and application of those principles to our

contemporary situation. The fruit of that original document and the insights that it still holds forth should be enough to convince us that in it the Holy Spirit has led us thus far. The first suggestion I would make is that we reiterate and take seriously the definition of the church as stated by Thomas Campbell in the Declaration and Address. It reads, as you will very well remember, "That the Church of Christ on earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one; consisting of those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures, and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct." An acceptance of this principle should lead to a new interpretation of the second proposition. We know that not only do congregations necessarily exist in separate localities, but also that the divisions among us have led to a situation where we have congregations that do not find their work or worship compatible with one another. I urge that even these congregations recognize one another as communities of fellow Christians and do not act in bitterness and competition. One simple expedient would do much to alleviate our tensions. When new congregations are planted or new institutions developed, we should not seek to be competitive by moving into the same area where a congregation or institution, whether "independent" or "cooperative," is serving its community well. Rather, we should seek those many areas where the gospel is badly needed and no one is providing it. Thus there need be no competing for funds or proselyting of members. We may also find fellowship in local ministerial associations and in common community projects. Sincere participation in one another's conventions and assemblies can be a means of spiritual enrichment. By such simple means as these we would come to the point that with Thomas Campbell we could say that there should be no schism, no uncharitableness, and no antagonism, but rather that we "receive one another as Christ Jesus has received us."

Second: I propose that we recognize publicly and mutually, what we accept in fact, that we stand under the judgment and direction of Jesus Christ as he is made known to us in the Scriptures, and that we sincerely think and act in accord with the basic principle that the Scriptures and especially the New Testament provide the norm for the faith and life of the church.

We should recognize, however, that one of our most serious differences, if not the basic difference, lies in our understanding of the authority of the Scriptures. The issue is so crucial and so complex that a whole series of discussions should be given to it. Neither my time nor my assigned subject permits such a discussion. I would only suggest that each of us do a conscientious self-study to determine whether or not his view of the authority of the Scriptures is intelligent and valid in the light of serious biblical studies. At one extreme, biblical authority has been neglected and at times only lip service has been given to it. At the other extreme, no real distinction has been made between basic biblical truths and our own theological interpretations. In such cases, the Bible has become a set of laws no less rigid and no less superficial than the traditions of the Pharisees. Neither of these alternatives will do. We must become increasingly aware that God has made himself known to us in his mighty deeds, through his prophets, and supremely in Jesus Christ. In the Scriptures this revelation of God is communicated to us as in a personal encounter with him. Here we are confronted with both his radical demands and his gracious promises. To know his will for our time is often difficult but it is essential for our personal relationship that we come into loving submission to him. In any case, only the clearest understanding of the principles of biblical interpretation and the deepest consecration of heart with a will devoted

to knowing the will of God, can save us from disaster.

With such an understanding there will be both unity and freedom. A thorough commitment to the will of God made known in Jesus Christ will lead us also to recognize that however valuable and attractive for ourselves our particular theological position may be, we must not make our conclusions and judgments conditions of fellowship nor tools to exclude those who, like ourselves, love and seek to be obedient to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Third: I propose that in setting up programs, structures, and institutions, we recognize that they are our own creations and that they have no more sacredness than that origin confers upon them. Hence, they will remain subject to such alternations as the cause of Christ demands in every new and living situation and should never become issues by which we include or exclude our brothers who are as dear to our Lord as we ourselves are. To take such a position posits the possibility that there may be many varieties of agencies dependent for their support and direction upon those who find these particular agencies their best way of serving Jesus Christ and the cause of his church.

Finally: I propose that, in the words of Thomas Campbell, we should "consider each other as the precious saints of God, should love each other as brothers, children of the same family and Father, temples of the same Spirit, members of the same body, subjects of the same grace, objects of the same Divine love, bought with the same price, and joint heirs of the same inheritance. Whom God has thus joined together no man should dare to put asunder."

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THESE CONSULTATIONS ON INTERNAL UNITY

by

James B. Carr

For several years a commission appointed by the International Convention engaged in a restudy of the Disciples of Christ. The report of this Restudy Commission accented points of agreement and disagreement among members of Christian Churches. The report was accompanied by a recommendation that full and free discussion of these issues be continued in church papers, local congregations, district, state and national gatherings. After the publication of the Report and the recommendation, little or nothing came of it.

The present series of consultations resulted from one of the Consultations in ecumenical Christian Unity sponsored jointly by the Council on Christian Unity and Phillips University. In one of the discussion groups, this writer observed that whatever principles we urge for ecumenical concerns must also be applicable within our own brotherhood. This discussion group spent most of its allotted time trying to face up to problems of internal unity.

When time ran out it was suggested that a consultation on internal unity might be desirable. Accordingly, this writer sent out letters of inquiry to over fifty representative ministers and professors in the Oklahoma-Kansas area. From thirty-five responses only two were pessimistic. The others enthusiastically endorsed the idea. A committee was arbitrarily selected to plan the consultation. A sincere effort was made to maintain a balance on the committee between those who are "cooperative" and those who are "independent."

The following persons comprised the initial planning committee: James B. Carr, chairman, Dyre Campbell, Ting Champie, John Greenlee, Charles Gresham, Clifford Hauxwell, W. L. McEver, and Thomas O. Parish.

The first mass meeting consultation on internal unity convened at Friends University, Wichita, Kansas, June 2-3, 1959. Over 200 people were in attendance at this meeting, with "cooperatives" and "independents" nearly equal in number. The addresses and discussion group reports, including two summations, one by a "cooperative", the other by an "independent", have been published.

The second consultation on internal unity was held in the Broadway Christian Church, Wichita, Kansas, February 8-10, 1961. There were 225 registered for this meeting (179 from outside of Wichita), from 12 states and the District of Columbia. The addresses and reports from this meeting have been published also. At the closing session the people present completed a questionnaire evaluating the consultation. Only one person advised discontinuance of such conversations. Nine others were discouraged but willing to continue. All the rest of 93 persons responding to this questionnaire were hopeful, encouraged, or enthusiastic.

This consultation selected a continuation committee to further the conversations by whatever means seemed most expedient. Ting Champie was the chairman of this committee. The next actual meeting of significance was an invitational consultation, held at Camp Redlands near Stillwater, Oklahoma, October 24-26, 1961. The fifteen men who attended planned the program for the Third Consultation on Internal Unity held at the Wheeling Avenue Christian Church, Tulsa, Oklahoma, February 27-March 1, 1962. There were 178 registered delegates with attendance at evening sessions in excess of 300. There were more "independents" than "cooperatives" register (almost 2-1 ratio), but many of those who

accepted the designation "independent" did so reluctantly, considering themselves unclassifiable. In the discussion groups there seemed to be a fair balance of interests.

Ninety-five of those present returned evaluation questionnaires indicating a desire to continue these meetings. Some specified an invitational type of consultation, others the mass meeting.

Accordingly an invitational meeting was called at the Disciples of Christ Historical Society, Nashville, Tennessee, March 11-13, 1963. Eighty-three invitations were sent out, fifty-four registered for the consultation. The four formal presentations contained in this volume formed the basis for group discussions. The discussion leaders were: Dr. E. W. Hawkins, Phillips Graduate Seminary; Dean Seth Wilson, Ozark Bible College; Dr. George Earle Owen, United Christian Missionary Society; and Mr. Martin Mitchum, elder, First Christian Church, Rolla, Missouri. The orientation address by the chairman, James B. Carr, Manhattan Bible College, is also included.

The Continuation Committee for planning future consultations is composed of: Dr. Charles Gresham, chairman, Mr. Martin Mitchum, Dr. George Earle Owen, Dean Seth Wilson, Professor Woodrow Phillips, Professor Lloyd Taylor, Mr. Hugh Holland, Mr. Howard Nichols, Mr. Sheldon Elliott, Dr. Robert O. Fife, Professor James B. Carr, and Dr. Don West.

It is interesting and gratifying to note that other consultations on internal unity are being held and some personnel overlap from these referred to here. Two have been held in Michigan, one in Indianapolis, one in Pennsylvania and others are being considered. It is the feeling of many thoughtful people of varying opinions that as long as the line of communication is kept open, a united brotherhood may yet be realized.

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